

ROMAN
BIZNET

GEORGIA WOOD PANGBORN

A. F. Chipman



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ROME . . . GAVE HIS FIRST PERFORMANCE (page 148)

R O M A N B I Z N E T

By GEORGIA WOOD PANGBORN



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PART I

ROMAN BIZNET

CHAPTER I

THE GRASSHOPPERS

THE Biznets came to Cosmos at hop-picking time, seeking Alphonsine Conto, like two unprofitable grasshoppers coming to an ant at the end of summer.

Tony Biznet, frayed and gaunt, carried a fiddle, — that instrument of grasshoppers; his walk, too, had a light, wiry swing, more like the motion of insect legs than the muscular plod of vertebrates. The boy trotted along so close under the elbow encircling the violin that he banged his head against it now and then.

It was late twilight, a day and a night having elapsed in their journey from the country of the habitants. But they went now at a better pace, for when they started Phœbe Biznet was with them, and now they had left her, some five miles back, with moles, squirrels, owls, falling leaves; with some inches' depth of black earth to protect her from the night and whatever might prowl in it. She had always been afraid of night and loneliness; her timidity in this particular so annoying

Antoine that he had tried to beat it out of her, this being what made it necessary, in the end, to leave her behind, with a covering of earth and leaves.

Although his mother had often told him this thing was bound to happen some time, now that it was accomplished, Roman Biznet was put in great doubt and dismay. Yet, since she could foretell it, it must have been one of those inevitable things which it is unreasonable to object to, like weather or white whiskey; and if one can't avoid an unpleasant thing, it is best to be philosophical about it; then, too, if one's grandmother was a squaw, she probably had much to be philosophical about, which makes it easier for her posterity to be so.

He and his mother had accepted life and Antoine without much comment, although Phœbe had sometimes referred to a happy childhood in terms that seemed to imply regret and desire for change. One night Antoine was hunting them both with a carving knife, — an unusual state of affairs, for as a rule Phœbe was a fugitive alone, while Antoine kept the boy by him as an equal, a partisan, an audience for his fiddle, since he knew enough to be silent, while Phœbe talked or laughed or cried, and paid no attention to fine passages. But that night Roman Biznet had suggested that he would like to play the fiddle himself, which was not to be thought of; and they had hidden among some stacked hop-poles, where it was quiet, warm, and comfortable. There was something homelike and

consolatory in the wigwam shape of the stacked poles, although they had no knowledge of wigwams; but if one's ancestors have lived in such since foxes had holes and birds of the air nests, hop-poles, indistinctly cone-shaped in the starlight, must seem a natural sanctuary.

Antoine having gone back to his whiskey blanc and his fiddle, Phœbe had talked to the boy until after cock-crow about a glorious place called Cosmos, where was much food and but little whiskey blanc. Everybody was young there, and happy, the women having beautiful dresses and dancing much of the time; and there was an event called the County Fair, during which Antoine had once played for the dancing. In this strange town even Antoine had seemed a pretty good fellow.

Phœbe also told of a woman who lived there, large, strong, and kind, to whom Phœbe said she would go some day and take Roman with her. But now it was Antoine who was taking him, and this did not seem fair or reasonable, — to leave Phœbe behind in the way they had done and then to seek out Phœbe's sister.

“I'm tired.”

Roman Biznet sat down in front of his father like a period. It never paid to argue a matter with Antoine. That was where Phœbe had made so many mistakes. If one merely did a thing as a matter of course, it was likely to pass unnoticed. Antoine's long legs skipped over him before their momentum could be arrested.

“Sacré-e dam!”

He poised an instant on one foot, gesticulating suggestively at the period with the other, but thought better of it and scratched the calf of his leg instead. He peered uncertainly at the withered bushes either side of the narrow road, southward where a planet, in the direction of Cosmos, was like a window light, but not backward, where Canada was a purple bank of cloud between the faded red bands of the sunset and the St. Lawrence. Antoine vaguely suspected that he might as well ask alms of the planet itself as of the homely gleam of his sister-in-law's window. It is a sordid world.

“But we can't get anything to eat here.”

His voice was rasping, as one would expect of a grasshopper houseless on frosty nights, but there was a certain deference in his tone, as to an equal.

The period said nothing, but curled itself into a rounder and more invincible full stop. Antoine shuffled uneasily from one tired foot to the other. But Hermes, god of grasshoppers, is a kindly deity. Something within the brush fidgeted on a branch, saying querulously to its fellow, “Tut, tut! Don't crowd so!”

Antoine glided into the bushes, first placing the violin, with threatening pantomime, at the foot of a tree. The boy swiftly unhooked the battered case and poked his fingers among the strings, carefully as one touches the hand of a sleeping baby in its cradle, coaxing tiny guitar sounds from it; grinning widely and defiantly into the bushes, whence came stifled squawks.

When Antoine returned, two limp bunches of feathers dangling from his hand, the violin was as he had left it, his son still coiled in the middle of the road, staring moodily southward at the thickening darkness.

“You’ve been at it!”

“Tiens!” said the boy quietly, without turning his head.

Antoine stepped forward, hesitated, then opened the case, and looked at the fiddle. This reassured him, and they amicably sought a near-by field, peopled with ghostly stacks of corn and scattered pumpkins, made a fire of pilfered rails, and in it placed the chickens, rolled up in balls of mud. These, with a few ears of corn, so old and dry that none but the emptiest stomach could have considered them, and some bellefleur apples, stolen by the boy while his father prepared the rest of the dinner, soon made a better meal than the ant was wont to set upon her table. They cracked open the mud balls, out of which the chickens popped clean and featherless, like nut-meats from their shells, and they ate without salt and picked the bones.

Sitting crosslegged by the fire, watching it with their glowing black eyes, they laid aside temporarily the armed neutrality in which they were journeying, and munched apples good-naturedly. Antoine lit his pipe, and the boy, producing a corncob pipe of his own make, received enough tobacco, so that when he had pieced it out with corn-husk shreds he enjoyed a full-fledged smoke.

“W’at you gon do in Cosmos?” he asked at last with a judicial air.

Antoine puffed languidly, taking counsel of the lurid coals; his face, as the red light played upon it, seemed quiet and gentle enough, but the boy set his little lips grimly on the stem of his pipe as he watched him.

“W’at you gon do in Cosmos, hein?” he repeated peremptorily.

Antoine roused slightly, glancing at his son in an absent-minded way.

“Do? Oh, get a job, I suppose.”

“Fiddling?”

“I don’t know.”

“W’at if Phosy ain’t there?”

“I don’t know.”

“Me, I’m gon to school.”

“Suit yourself.”

Antoine took the fiddle from its case and began to play, knowing that he could thus melt his son’s unpleasantly practical humor; and as he played a listener, understanding the ways of the world, would have wondered why this man need find himself poor and ragged.

Roman Biznet cuddled into a posture whence he could watch his father, the fire, the stars, while puffing his pipe.

They did not sleep that night, but went on in an hour or so. At sunrise they breakfasted on what apples were left, and crawled into a thicket close by a noisy little brook to sleep for the day.

CHAPTER II

AT THE HOP-HOUSE

IT rained on them, a drizzle that the trees would have kept out a week before. But the trees were going suddenly brown and threadbare. Antoine slept, snoring in an unlovely manner, his loose red lips open, a frown on his low forehead, which was wrinkled in three furrows from temple to temple, the lax skin permitting him to bristle his scalp when angry, as a dog raises his hackles.

The boy kept awake, shivering, his face turned toward Canada through the gray rain. Once he went back to the road, and stood so long in the chilly mud, looking toward the north, that he had much ado to get his feet from the sucking mire, when he gave it up at last, and went back to his father.

At twilight the ceasing of the rain and a dismal flare of crimson in the west roused them, as normal creatures are roused at sunrise, and they tramped on so nimbly that at ten o'clock they reached the outskirts of Cosmos, and ate their supper, sitting on a barren hill whose sand had drunk up the day's rain and still was thirsty. The town's lights were already winking out one by one. Beneath was a valley, and a prosperous hop-yard in it, half harvested. The hop-house window was

alight, the sounds that came up proving the hop-pickers not too tired with their day's work for merrymaking. Somebody was playing on a comb, and the raucous rasping of it was as if an ill-advised katydid were trying a new tune and making bad work of it. Feet were pounding rhythmically like the drumming of a piston; "thumpty, thumpty, thumpty." At intervals a nasal voice called off figures.

Antoine grinned. "I bet Phosy's there."

He grew suddenly sober and scratched his head, taking off his hat for the purpose, and cast a side-long look at the small hunched shoulders of his son. Something in the expression of that little back did not please him, and he burst violently into a long anatomical lecture about the various things he would do to the boy if he failed to keep his mouth shut. But the contemptuous shoulders seemed no wise impressed.

Antoine faltered in the middle of a swear word, and filled his pipe with unsteady fingers. "You — you don't want your father hung, do you, Romy?"

"I don't mind."

"Anyhow, I did n't do anything, or I did n't mean to, and it would just make your Aunt Phosy feel bad. What's the use?"

"Oh, well," assented his son carelessly, "I guess maybe I won't tell, but you got to behave yourself."

"Oh, that's all right," said Antoine heartily, drawing upon the red glow of his pipe. "Don't you worry about that." He clapped his son's

shoulders affectionately, and then examined the violin to see what harm had come to it in the rain. The air was growing dry and cold, and she might come out of her case presently.

But the boy had no desire to hear his father's fiddle whine that night. He had visions of motherly women, with the smell of cooking about their calico wrappers; of boys of his own age, people who knew nothing about music; and the racket in the hop-house pleased his ear; the gleaming red window drew him like an inquisitive moth.

The window was high, but a beam had been braced against that side of the house to correct a tumble-down tendency, and up this Roman Biznet scrambled until he could look in. As he knotted himself about the beam, the dancers were dwindling, leaving only a woman, whose long black hair switched in a braid below her waist, instructing a tiny girl in a species of clog dance, — something with a shuffle and a kick and a stamp, most emphatic in its rhythm; the child, screaming with delight, jumped up and down and crosswise all out of time, while the woman's face was as sober and anxious as if it had been a sewing instead of a dancing lesson.

The comb-player, a withered old Frenchman, slapped the floor with his great feet in time with his music. Mothers of families were fastening quilts and blankets to the beams to shut in their own particular households for the night, and gossiped among the draperies with cheerful nasal twang.

“Hi, Phosy Conto, you 'n' your li'l' gal gon danse all night? I can't sleep, me. Gimme my comb, you Pete.”

A withered face poked out from a tattered quilt. The comb-player meekly wiped his instrument with the paper which had been wrapped about it, and delivered it to the outstretched hand. Phosy Conto tossed her head and pinned up her own blankets, still keeping up a dancing motion as she worked, while the little girl played bear with the old woman who had objected.

The boy at the window flattened his nose against the glass, and grinned wistfully. So that was his Tante Phosy, for there could not be two of that name, so tall and strong and good-natured, and there was something about her — a film of likeness which eluded the eye if one looked at her feature by feature — which made her Phœbe's sister without a doubt.

The room was resonant with nasal speech and laughter. But they were suddenly frozen and silent, their cheerful faces bleak with fear. From somewhere at the edge of the night outside, a thin blade of sound cut through their noise, a shrill and desolate cry, which might have been the dreary hoot of an owl, but was not; nor was it the howl of a dog. A human creature frightened and hurt might wail like that, and yet it was hardly human.

“Qu'est-ce que c'est?” somebody whispered with stiff lips.

“Chat!”

“Pas de tout, — de tout!”

“Los' bébé?”

“Squire Heathway's bloodhound.”

“Non, c'est une femme. Elle pleure.”

“Loup-garou!”

The last opinion seemed to meet the assent of the crowd. There was a hissing intake of breath. Mothers picked up whimpering children. Men tried to get behind each other.

The boy, flattened to his beam, shook with tearful laughter. He slid down backward as a cat comes down a tree, and ran quickly through the sandy mud. He feared pursuit. There had been a red-haired man who did not shake like the rest, and he had pulled on his boots while the others shivered.

The door of the hop-house banged behind him; Pete Mountain's boots were on, and he was coming to see about that loup-garou. Roman Biznet rushed to his father then, and cuffed him on the ears.

“Va-t-en, you old crapaud!”

Antoine paused long enough in his artistic enjoyment to hear Pete Mountain's approaching steps, then grunted and quietly put the violin in its case, even polishing the bow, so nonchalant was he, and the two faded gently away.

CHAPTER III

THE HOUSE OF THE ANT

THE house of the ant, little, gray with weather, lay with others like it at the base of a barren shoulder of a hill, but higher up than its fellows, with an aloofness that was partly a mental attitude, Alphonsine St. Luce Conto being an aristocrat.

She could neither read nor write, though she knew which side up to hold her prayer-book, and when to turn the leaves as the priest read. Her great-grandfather had been "Paris French;" and according to most emphatic tradition, this gentleman had been a marquis in his day, riding about the streets of Paris in a golden coach. Afterward he rode as complacently in a tumbril, with other seigneurs, when tumbrils replaced golden coaches as the proper thing. It was then that St. Luce fils, escaping by some one of the romantic devices described in the many stories of that time, came to America, married a squaw, a chief's daughter, and shared his father-in-law's wigwam. The next generation settled down in St. Regis and degenerated, after the manner of half-breeds.

But the golden coach was kept bright in their memories, if becoming somewhat hazy, like a solar myth, from much imagining. Alphonsine rocked Kitty Conto to sleep with a drowsy but gorgeous

tale of a magnificent gentleman who wore a stove-pipe hat daily, whose trousers were creased accurately, like Squire Heathway's, who kept two washerwomen busy, being dainty beyond belief about his linen. And the diamond studs in his shirt bosom were as big and bright as the jewels on Victoria's crown. If Alphonsine had one of those, it was n't a dye-shop she and Kitty would be having; it was a house as big as the Protestant church; and Miss Emily Tracy and Mrs. Heathway would be coming to take tea with them every night. And dolls? And dolls as big as Kitty's self. And a li'l' p'tit rocking chair? Mais oui, twenty li'l' p'tit rocking chairs. And a li'l' p'tit chicken for the ole yellow hen? Yes, as many li'l' chickens as the ole yellow hen could ask for.

There was a suggestion of ancient grandeur about the dye-shop. One might even fancy a certain military glory redivivus in the swinging cloths, like banners, dripping red as blood, or yellow as lemons, or blue as turquoise. The drip of many colors on the absorbent pine floor stained it richly, although pans were put beneath the drip and every new slop was greeted with outcry and wiped up at once. But for this prompt polishing, the effect would doubtless have been dingy, but with it, — at least according to Kitty, — one might play at walking about on sunset clouds.

It was after Alphonsine became a widow, Ba'tiste having gone to Purgatory with great suddenness in the ruck of a log jam one spring, that she decided to rise in the social scale for Kitty's sake.

Ba'tiste had been no good until he saved a little French village with his life, and Alphonsine had supported her husband and baby up to that time by washing. It was surprising how large a part of the population of Cosmos wore linen of her whitening. There was the power of a steam laundry in those mighty arms. Cosmos pleaded and almost wept when it occurred to her that the daughter of a dyer of cloth could meet the world with a prouder face than the daughter of a washer of soiled linen.

There was less money in dyeing, to be sure, but one had to sacrifice something to family tradition. The old marquis, she was positive, would have approved the dye-shop.

This was the house, then, that the Biznets came to on leaving the hop-yard, Antoine nonchalantly picking the lock, which yielded as if to a master key.

Even before striking a light they sniffed out all the provisions, placing them together in the middle of the kitchen table. They made a brisk fire, and cooked everything, just for the joy of smelling it, and looking upon it when they could eat no more. Then leaving the dishes soiled and scattered, the stove greasy and strewn with ashes, they curled up snugly in Phosy's trim bed, a frouzy black head in the middle of each crisp pillow sham, and slept as only weary grasshoppers can sleep, who, after a desolate march, come upon warmth for their idle legs and food for their empty craws.

CHAPTER IV

ALPHONSINE

LATE in the next afternoon, Alphonsine returned, she and Kitty having left the wagon of hop-pickers in the valley. It was a fair warm day, ripe with the odor of red and yellow leaves shriveling in the sun. They came slowly along the winding lane, for Kitty had to go through the deepest places in the rustling drifts of leaves, becoming delightfully lost and overwhelmed therein, for she was a little body, doing all things with enthusiasm. In her red calico slip, she might have been the genius of all red maple leaves.

They rounded a hillock, whence they should have seen their little house demurely shuttered and locked, but it was wide open to the western sunshine, the grasshoppers sunning in the doorway.

Kitty whimpered. Alphonsine stood with fallen jaw and angry eye. "My Lord! It's dat Tony Biznet, come back lak one chicken for roost! W'ere 's Phœbe?"

Antoine looked mournful, saying nothing, but staring at the ground in an effective way. His eyelids blinked rapidly, as if winking away tears; but once, in his youth, an angry abbé had said, "I can always tell when you are lying, my son, for your eyelids quiver as if you were facing a strong light."

The boy looked his aunt over slowly and comprehensively. Phosy turned upon him fiercely.

“W’ere’s you mère?”

“Morte,” answered the boy.

Phosy stood quite still and expressionless, and there was no sound but the rustle of leaves about her. Then she threw her apron over her head, and groped into the kitchen; Kitty put both thumbs into her mouth, and scowled at the strangers; Roman Biznet, turning his back upon the three, sat down on the door-sill, and stared sulkily at the autumn sunshine.

“W’at did she die of, Tony?” asked Phosy after a long silence.

Antoine shuffled his feet, glancing inquiringly at his son’s back. He could lie glibly enough himself, but wished to be certain how far the boy would back him up.

“Consumption,” he ventured at length. The boy nodded approvingly, and Antoine’s face cleared. Then Roman Biznet considerably left the two, that his father might lie with greater ease.

Glancing back, as he shuffled into the lane of leaves, he saw Tony seated, with his head on his hands, as though in deep dejection. The red maple leaf of a girl was coming after him, for grown people in trouble are tiresome, and apt to be cross to little girls.

He waited for her; and then she came more slowly, making a pretense of finding things of interest at the side of the road, from the examination of which she would dart sudden glances at him,

keeping her thumb in her mouth the while. At a yard's distance she stopped and smiled up at him under her hair, which was cut short in a bang and hung below her eyebrows. His gloomy face brightened with a shadow of the same smile; a little one-sided smile it was they had in common; their mouths were alike, fine at the corners and sensitive.

“Do you — go to school?” he asked.

“No, I ain't big enough. Lizzie Orleana goes to school. I've got a doll. She has n't got a doll.”

“You don't say!”

“Adlor Santwire goes to school. But he stayed out for hop-picking. That's him.”

Roman Biznet noticed the roof of another house, one step lower down the hill, and sitting astride the ridgepole a boy, older than himself, cracking nuts with a brick he had taken from the chimney, picking the nuts from an overhanging branch.

“Come and see our hen's nest,” said Kitty. “There ain't any eggs in it. A rat gets them. I made the nest myself.”

She took his hand, always keeping one of her thumbs in her mouth, and led him, with much mystery, to a high board fence, draped with a hop vine or two, and the frosted black remnant of a morning-glory vine. There was a cunningly hidden symmetrical nest of hay, quite empty; a yellow hen, much frayed from molting, scuttled out of the vines.

“That’s her!” said Kitty, in a tone of deep respect. “That’s my hen.”

There was a scrambling on the other side of the fence, and grimy fingers appeared, clinched upon the top. Then rose a shock of blue-black hair, and a smile.

“Hello, Adlor.”

Adlor looked doubtfully at the stranger, then abruptly emptied a pint of butternut meats into Kitty’s outstretched apron and disappeared. They sat in the hen’s nest, and shared them.

They did not return to the house until after dusk, Roman Biznet feeling a delicacy about meeting his aunt, while Kitty did not like the new man. The boy accepted her verdict upon his father with gloomy acquiescence. He did not care particularly about him himself. Yet, for the family reputation, he entered into glowing accounts of Tony’s skill with the violin, until Kitty became anxious to go back to the house for the purpose of seeing such a wonder.

The ant gave them no supper that night. It was long past supper time when she thought of food at all. Then she looked about her, and saw the remnants of the grasshopper ménage.

As her grief for Phœbe had been quietly stoical, her anger at the disorder was loud and fierce. The larder was bare, — not a pinch of tea or an ounce of bacon, not an onion, not a dried pea; for the peas had been cooked in a huge pot that she had used for purple dye. Evidently the Biznets had hesitated to eat this strangely brilliant vegetable

when it was done, and had set aside the great mauve mass, enough for a week's supply.

Alphonsine flung kettle and all through the window, nearly extinguishing the yellow hen, which leaped aside with a dismal squawk, and then returned to fill her crop, being color blind.

Tony went outside then, taking his violin. He was sitting pensively on the roadside, his chin propped in his hand, watching the first star twinkling above the sunset, when the children returned to the house.

They hesitated, hearing the strident monologue inside, the clatter of furniture jerked into place, the chairs being spanked, the tables pulled about by their ears, and the dishes knocking together with a sound of cracking skulls.

Before the racket had ceased, replaced by a low murmur of sobbing, the stars were all out, and a thin moon hanging brightly where the sunset had vanished. They could see her through the lighted window, seated in a chair by the freshly washed table, her gingham apron over her face, her straight body swaying back and forth monotonously. Presently she arose, and, coming to the door, called for Kitty. There was anxiety in her voice, as though death were about like a wolf, and, having tasted the blood of one, might hunger for more.

“An' you, Tony Biznet, if you gon sleep in my house to-night, you come along and get upstairs. I don' leave no door unlok for you — you hear me?”

Tony slunk in with his fiddle, and the boy after him. So fierce was the woman in the doorway, so hawk-like her tear-swollen face, that Roman Biznet had a comfortable feeling that everybody would be safe from Antoine in this place, — that carving knives and white whiskey would not be allowed.

He looked up at her knowingly and caught her eye, whereupon she whacked him; and there was something restful in the stern act, bespeaking, as it did, law, order, authority.

When the two had ascended the rickety stairs to the unfinished loft, she threw after them, with high disdain, that bedding in which they had slept the previous night, — bolsters, frilled pillow shams, gay red spread. She would have none of it, muddied and rumpled as it was by their shiftless contact.

CHAPTER V

ANTOINE DEPARTS

ALPHONSINE had a dream-book, with woodcuts in it. Although she could not read, she understood perfectly the explanations attached to them, having learned by heart from her mother, a wise woman, understanding medicine according to Iroquois lore, as well as the Black Art of white men.

That night, when she heard Tony snore, she went to a cupboard, where she kept poisonous dyes under lock and key, took out the dream-book from behind bottles and packages, and sat down with it at her kitchen table, shaking a fist toward the ceiling, above which her brother-in-law lay.

“I’ll fin’ out, you Johnny Crapaud! I’ll fin’ out, me! Mebbe you get keel yourself!”

She read — if it was reading — until the roosters began to crow, from the near-by shout of the Santwire fowl, who, with Phosy’s yellow hen, had stolen a roost on the dividing fence, where they were sheltered by a blackened vine, to the far-off trumpet call of the lordly buff-cochin at the Tracy barn, the aristocrat on the hill and the plebeian of French Hollow answering each other. It was still dark, but one could hear the uneasy stir of morning, the impatience for light. She closed the

book, sighing, and turned to the window. The reflection of her own face in the dark glass startled her.

“My Lord! I t’ought it was Phœbe! But I’ll fin’ out. I’ll get you, my boy!”

With which mysterious menace and many upward looks, she went to her bedroom and lay down by Kitty, fast asleep with her thumb in her mouth.

“Oh, you bad li’l’ gal,” whispered Alphonsine softly; “you spoil you pretty li’l’ fingers dat way.”

She pulled out the thumb and looked at it tenderly. Her eyes were so blurred that there seemed three small pink digits at least.

“An’ she ’s lak Phœbe.”

She kissed the wayward thumb, and then noticed an expression of discontent on the sleeping face, a rigidity about the elbow.

“She wants ’er thumb,” said Phosy, laughing through tears, and carefully tucked it back as she had found it, Kitty’s lips closing upon it with a smack of welcome. Then Phosy shut her eyes and lay rigid; though whether she slept that night or entered into a trance and wandered forth in spirit on her fierce and sorrowful errand, psychologic, telepathic—I don’t know that naming it makes it less a mystery.

She rose at her usual breakfast hour, and her face, as she prepared the food, was black with anger. She burnt the fried potatoes to a crisp; the johnny-cake was leaden within and black without; the tea was strong and bitter with boiling.

Antoine looked at his sister-in-law doubtfully as he sat down to this feast. He was in an humble and conciliatory mood. With him it was always a period of great peace and innocence, a short time before his devil awoke, for the devil is by nature intermittent, being constant in but few natures. On this particular morning, for all the evil in his soul he might have been a Sunday-school superintendent. He was thinking what a pity it was that Phosy should look ill-tempered on this beautiful morning, and that he might chop some wood for her presently. He even tried to look pleasant as he partook of the evil-tasting breakfast.

Roman Biznet seemed to find nothing wrong, but ate with a relish ; then brought out an apple from inside his shirt to share with Kitty, and with this they went out together to pay their respects to the yellow hen.

Tony picked up his fiddle as the children left. He would play a little before chopping that wood.

Alphonsine looked long and malevolently at his unconscious profile, then put some fresh tea in a saucer, on which she poured some boiling water, let it stand for an instant, and solemnly twirled the dish three times. Then she poured off the water. Tony, who was playing some classical and intricate thing, was quite unconscious of her fierce eyes traveling from his face to the tea leaves, from the tea leaves to his face. She finished the contemplation of them, rose slowly and took a step toward him, but reconsidered and went to the

cupboard, whence she took some tinfoil. This she melted in a large iron spoon. Tony finished his music as this ceremony began, and regarded her with a kindly smile.

“Telling your fortune, Phosy?”

“Tellin’ my fortune — yes.”

Tony, being an educated man, was not superstitious. It came to him that Alphonsine was a remarkably handsome woman, as she bent above the red glow of the fire. There was something regal about her hooked nose and narrow eyes, about the full sweeping lines of her figure. The stories of noble ancestry were easy of belief. Now, Phœbe had been a frail thing, with big eyes, a small chin, an arm nowhere beyond the compass of a man’s thumb and finger. Phœbe had loved to dance, had laughed or cried at everything. That was what made the trouble, her laughing and crying. Alphonsine, now —

She dropped the melted lead, with a swift turn of the wrist, into a basin of water, carried this to the window, and studied it carefully. There was something portentous and fateful in her manner. Tony looked over his shoulder to see whether the door were locked, and then rose, carefully nonchalant, and sauntered toward it, violin in hand, — not that he expected any ill from Alphonsine, but he was a cautious man and did not feel belligerent that morning.

Phosy set down the basin upon the table. Her chest was heaving. One hand quietly closed about

the handle of a large bread knife. She looked up, and Tony quailed.

“Va-t-en!” she said.

When the children came in an hour later, for they had been to call on Adlor Santwire and his guinea pigs, Alphonsine was furiously at work with a kettle of scarlet dye. There were red splashes upon her face, and her arms were red above the elbows, giving her the appearance of one steeped in blood.

“Your fader gone off, Romy,” she said kindly enough. “You gon stay an’ be my li’l’ boy. Only you got be good to Kitty. My — my, ’ow you look lak you mère!”

Yet, as has been said, the boy was in every way his father’s miniature. Perhaps, however, Alphonsine saw more deeply, and something, after all, like Phœbe was masked behind the features of Antoine.

He looked up into her face long and soberly. He asked no question, but as the two exchanged look for look he knew she had found out Antoine, and she knew that dreams and sorceries had not spoken untruly.

“Eh, b’en,” she said. “You wan’ remember to be good to Kitty — else I’ll lick you!”

And he promised that he would be good.

CHAPTER VI

DOCTOR WINTHROP AT HOME

THERE were in Cosmos two important families, whose houses stood side by side. The Heathway house was of red brick, severely square, its grounds laid out in a formal way. "Walk here. Smell of these roses. You may sit down on this rustic bench and admire the view, but please do not step on the grass if you want to get somewhere else — you will find a cross-walk farther up."

The Tracy house was vaguely Greek in design, with many white pillars supporting verandas on three sides. The grounds were larger than those of the Heathway place, but had a less conscientious look, as though one might find unexpected things here and there, — some flower that had no gardener for its sponsor; some litter of old leaves in a fence corner, and a suggestion of underbrush. It was largely, perhaps, the difference between a man's way of arranging outdoors and a woman's. Squire Heathway liked to see things trim and prosperous looking, while Miss Emily Tracy cared only that there should be flowers enough. The rest of her attention she gave to the house inside.

The houses faced a horizon made flat by the St. Lawrence, some twenty miles away, and behind

them were the Adirondacks, at that time unscarred by a railroad. One knew that the sun always rose somewhere among them, but never thought of getting through to anything southward. To journey into the world, one must go roundabout and by way of Lake Champlain.

Tucked behind well-trimmed hedges, in a corner of the Heathway place, was what had been a porter's lodge in those days of ante-bellum grandeur before Squire Heathway had lost money in some Southern venture. Now it had fallen to Dr. Winthrop, Squire Heathway's college chum and of his regiment, whom fate had treated badly in various ways, whose fiery and too ambitious youth lay dead somewhere on Southern camping-grounds, while in its stead he bore a Promethean liver. And he lived alone in his little house, "like some story-book animal," as he told Bessie Heathway.

Now and then it happens in a village that there is one *in loco parentis*, some old and lonely soul who keeps watch as from a high place, and whose advice is of value. He becomes something of a priest in time; confessions are made to him, and in a manner he can give absolution. "You are a silly child and have made a bad mistake, but it does n't matter so much as you think. Don't worry." The world did not seem so difficult when Dr. Winthrop had said this. Then, again, he might listen to one's sorrows with an amused and ancient smile, and at the end concoct some mixture out of his slender stock of drugs. "Stomach, my dear. Don't burden your conscience with what

does n't belong there. Take this — a spoonful after each meal." Or, if it were a serious case, if a woman's baby were dead, or a man had failed in business, or a child had broken its doll or lost its dog, there were wisdom and comfort in his silence and in the touch of his lean yellow hands.

On a day in early December, the short afternoon darkened by a soft, blinding fall of snow, which came slowly and lent itself to snowballs of delightful bigness and hardness, Dr. Winthrop lit his student-lamp with its green shade early, for he was working on a doll's sled for Bessie Heathway, and it must be done for Christmas. He was making it out of cigar boxes; he smoked many cigars, and excused himself by the toys which he carved from the cedar wood. There would have been plenty of time to finish several, if a well man had been doing the work, but one never could tell, having a liver — an illness might come upon him at any time, so that the little sled would be left in the lurch. In his enthusiasm and impatience, he used some surgical tools in its manufacture. For bone and wood are not such different materials, and there were like to be no more battlefields. Besides, there was a young doctor who did all that for the village now.

He was screwing the second runner in place, twisting his smiling mouth as he twisted the screw-driver, when there came a light knock at the door, and he hustled his work swiftly out of sight before saying "Come in." But it was Bessie's school-teacher, Miss Amy Bartlett, not Bessie. She, too,

was the daughter of an old friend, and had once sat on the doctor's lap and heard his stories. She was a thin, dark girl, bright-eyed, and with red spots in her hollow cheeks.

"Do you know any gentleman that likes chocolate cake?" she inquired carelessly, as she brushed the snow from her hat, and sent it hissing into the fireplace.

The doctor put on his spectacles and regarded suspiciously a napkin-covered parcel she had put on the table. He raised the napkin and smacked his lips, gathering up the crumbs that had broken off, with his yellow thumb and finger. It was a custom in the village for the women to propitiate him with their cookery — not that he needed propitiation, but it seemed a graceful way to open a consultation concerning any trouble.

"And how does the school get on, Amy?"

"Get on! It does n't. They've put more French young ones in my grade, you know, so of course there's disorder unspeakable, and presently I shall be asked to resign, I suppose."

"You still have Billy Tracy and Bessie Heathway. Don't you find Bessie a comfort?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," muttered Miss Bartlett without enthusiasm. "She — she takes as good care of me as she can, and if I make any mistakes in judgment or scholarship, comes to me privately after school and tells me all about it. Oh, yes, Bessie is quite a — grandmother to me."

Dr. Winthrop chuckled over a small piece of cake he had dug out with his finger, and coughed.

“I must speak to Bessie,” he said enjoyingly. “I’m afraid she does assume rather too much of the world’s burden at times.”

“I could stand Bessie all right, but those French children will drive me to my grave. Children are such brutes — I’m so discouraged!”

“You’re tired, my dear, and have lost your sense of the proportion of things. I’m going to give you some tea — with a stick in it — there’s nothing like that to bring things back into proper focus.”

There was a little brass teakettle on the hob and a turned-back crane, whose chains and hooks showed through the smoke. Ostensibly the doctor cooked his own meals at his fireplace; practically he used kerosene oil and a spirit-lamp. But the æsthetic feeling that he could cook as his grandmother had done, if he chose, was of value. He lit the spirit-lamp on the table and took the kettle from its false position on the hob.

“There is something slightly inebriating about tea, in spite of the proverb,” he said, as he filled the tea ball, “particularly if you put a stick in it;” and he brought out a squat black flask from a corner cupboard. “But slight intoxication is rather saner, to my thinking, than the dumps. Allow me.”

“How does it feel to be an angel, I wonder?” said Amy Bartlett, who was mopping her eyes as she took the cup he handed her.

“And speaking of angels,” he pursued, placidly sipping a companion cup, “which of the little

angels under your care is most in need of walloping and paregoric?"

"Roman B-B-Biznet, horrid little monkey!"

"Biznet? Some twelve years ago one heard that name frequently. I know a story or two to fit it. Tell me more about this simian child."

"Ask Bessie Heathway if you want it done in style. She had a consultation with me the day after he entered the school, inquiring whether it would be possible to have him sent to a reform school. It developed later that he had been making faces at her while she played the organ for marching."

"Poor Bess!"

"You may well say so. He has started in to make her life miserable. Nobody catches him at it, but *somebody* puts parlor matches where she steps on them, fills her desk with torn paper, steals her slate pencils, puts beetles in her lunch basket, and keeps the whole room generally in a turmoil. But when I look at this creature, his arms are folded, his face sanctimonious. Billy Tracy, the aristocrat, has become his most intimate friend, and" — she leaned forward with a sudden bright smile — "I am actually more fond of this creature than of any of the rest."

"That's the *ewig weibliche* of it. I'll tell you something about him; at least about his ancestry, which amounts to the same thing, for a man is his ancestry to a surprising extent."

The doctor lit a new cigar, and looked meditatively into the fireplace.

“Looked at in a general way,” said the doctor, “the human race and its evolution reminds me of live polyps rising on the skeletons of dead ones. The individual polyps don’t vary greatly. They only count as they help the upward tendency of the mass.

‘Dust into dust, and under dust, to lie.’

That’s the human polyp under his posterity.

“When the coral island reaches the air that lies above this ‘sea of troubles,’ there may be palms and things with wings to live upon it. But that need not interest the polyps, — they as a race will have ceased to be, yet as a foundation they will be secure enough for that life of the air.

“To the individual, heredity is a very different thing. It is — but we all know what heredity is to the individual. A man is his father, his grandfather, or his great-grandfather, as much as if the ancestor were reincarnated in him. Maybe he is. — To come down to the Biznets.

“There was a man once who presumably had a right to the name. There was another Biznet who should have been called something else. That was fifty years ago, about.

“Biznet Number One was an honest Frenchman — that is, as Frenchmen go; but my father used to say that all honest Frenchmen had wool growing in the palms of their hands. This man, at least, was plain Canuck, and a woodman. He has nothing whatever to do with your little Biznet, except in naming him.

“Fifty years ago this was pretty wild country — woods all about, hunters, Injuns that did n’t stay in St. Regis, catamounts, bears, deer. If a man anywhere in the world had done something to make the world hot under the collar, and if he was the sort of man who could stand solitude at all, he could hardly do better than to come up here in the woods somewhere and play hermit. That was fifty years ago.

“One day in winter, my father said, one of those crusty, glare-white, blue days that make one blind, a big fair man hove into Cosmos Tavern — where the hotel now stands — and asked for beer. There was n’t any; nothing but cider brandy, whiskey blanc, plain hard cider, and Old Tom gin. He cursed the country for it in some language the Canuck and Irishmen did n’t understand, and ended by filling up on cider brandy, whiskey blanc, and the rest, until he tumbled down behind the stove, where they let him lie, because, as I have said, he was a big man, and not good-natured.

“He paid well, however, and hung about there for a few days, grumbling monstrous words in his throat. He would go to the door and look off at the mountains, and then down the road, then come in to the fire and sulk. Old Grandpa Conto began to get tired of him, in spite of his being good pay.

“Then one day the Biznet that I spoke of came in and proceeded to get full, having just sold a load of wood to my father. ‘Hola! mon vieux — w’at’s your name — votre santé!’ says he,

waiting for the big fellow's name before emptying his glass.

“‘Ei, was? Meine name — Vat's yours?’

“‘Antoine Biznet.’

“‘Ja wohl. Ich auch. I am called Antoine Biznet. Ve are tvins!’

“No one dared to contradict him, and Antoine Biznet he remained to the end of the chapter, though once, tradition says, he spoke of himself, being very drunk, by some other name, but nobody that heard could remember anything about it, except that it began with ‘Von.’

“Now, this big German had a violin with him. Once, while he was drunk, young Conto sneaked it away from him and started to play ‘Money Musk,’ some French girls having come in for the evening, but he had got about halfway tuned when there was a roar from behind the stove, where they had thrown buffalo robes over the German when the girls came in, — for he was n't pretty when he got filled up with whiskey blanc, — and he came at them — bang!

“My father sewed up what was left of young Conto. Dutchie Biznet lit out and was n't heard of any more until spring.

“Then there came the story of a ghost somewhere up on Owl's Head. There was a light, and smoke, and these might have been human enough, but for a wild sort of whine the trappers heard — like a catamount in trouble, only pleasanter, was the way Mike Santwire put it. — You've got a descendant of Mike's in your school, by the way.

The family was becoming Irish at that time, but is French again now. Your boy's name is Adlor, but his hair is curly. I caught him stealing the Tracy apples once.

“Mike Santwire said it was a banshee — said somebody had been frozen to death up there and wanted to be buried, but nobody seemed to care about finding out.

“The spring came on, and it became known, gradually, that it was Dutchie Biznet up there with his fiddle. He had lived on game, and without firewater, ever since leaving the tavern in that huffy manner.

“He had built him a queer little cabin, so hidden in rocks, and through the winter so heaped with snow, that he was like some hibernating animal. Toward spring he came to the tavern and got sociably full again.

“Now, as I said when I began this yarn, there were Injuns in those days, and of rather better sort than most you will find in St. Regis now. And they got drunk, and made life unpleasant for their women folk, just like white anthropoids. There was old Powasket, who was falsely called chief, and wore a dirty blanket, and, I believe, stuck dirty feathers in his hair, though this may be an anachronism. Perhaps he was given to plug hats.

“And Powasket had a daughter, same as Shylock. I suppose she was dirty, too, and had a flat, oily face, and toed in, and was unpleasant generally. Tradition says she was a beauty, but

it is n't safe to trust tradition where romance is concerned. You say little Biznet is pretty? But that may come from his mother. However —

“One day Powasket got friskier than usual, with a carving knife — stolen from my father's kitchen, by the way. His daughter disappeared, and they were talking of making the old gentleman give an account of himself, when this same Mike Santwire reported that he had seen her hoeing a little patch of earth near Dutchie Biznet's cabin, Dutchie's fiddle, meanwhile, playing cata-mountain in sweetest style.

“Well, they were so far out of the world — Owl's Head is only a bit of blue from here — that nobody cared much, and Adam played while Eve delved and span, just about, I imagine, as if they were the first and only human critters on the globe. But —

“It was n't for having too much milk of human kindness that Dutchie Biznet left his mother country, and there was n't any particularly gentle streak in old Powasket's blood. It was said that there was some doubt which was fiddle and which was woman sometimes when they heard the crying up there on the mountains.

“But nobody paid any attention to them that summer, except when Dutchie Biznet came to town occasionally to get full. And the next winter came on.

“It was Christmas morning that Father Reilly found the Indian woman frozen in a drift near the mission house. She was almost naked, and seemed

at first to be carrying her clothes rolled up in her arms. And when Father Reilly undid this bundle, there was Biznet the Second, as snug as a bug in a rug, and about three days old.

“He was the father of your Biznet, and a bad one. They brought him up at the monastery, and he developed a genius for music. Then a rich man sent him to McGill. Then he forged, then he stole, then he disappeared for about twenty years and finally turned up here playing his fiddle at the county fair the year the war broke out. Then he ran away with little Phœbe St. Luce, who had noble French blood in her veins. They were married, and here is Biznet Number Three. I think I should like to see this little Biznet Number Three. From what you say there can't be much of his big yellow-haired grandfather about him.”

“No, little and black, with straight, stiff hair. But what became of Dutchie Biznet?”

“Oh, didn't I tell you that? Why, she'd chopped his head open with the axe while he was sleeping. They wiped the brains off the fiddle and took it to the monastery for Biznet the Second, when he should grow up. I believe it was an unusually fine Cremona—possibly a Strad. Tradition and Romance would make it a Strad. I am conservative myself. —

“Have another cup of tea. What a pity that women can't smoke! So look sharp for little Biznet the Third. Don't expect too much, nor yet too little. Too many cooks spoil the broth, and it's the same way with too many kinds of

ancestry. All things considered, you've got a broth of a boy to deal with. But his mother was a sweet little woman. Died of consumption, did she? Now, I wonder"—

CHAPTER VII

KITTY ENTERS GOOD SOCIETY

THE Cosmos graded school was a barren brick building, with sloppy looking doors and windows and an empty belfry. It had once been a parochial school, a dear ambition of Father Labelle, but lost to him and to the Sisters during the past fall by bad financial management; some said by a shrewd performance on the part of the town officials. Three class-rooms were on the lower floor; the upper part was a large assembly-room with a few little cells adjoining, where the French Sisters had slept. In this large room the Cosmos children were to hold forth in a Christmas celebration on the last day of the term; Miss Amy Bartlett had the great event in charge.

Dr. Winthrop had spent his afternoons for some time in helping Bessie Heathway to write her essay on "Christmas in Merrie England," and was rather proud of his literary effort.

Roman Biznet and Billy Tracy were to do the dialogue between Scrooge and his nephew. Roman was to be the nephew, shouting shrilly, "Merry Christmas, uncle!" Billy rejoining grimly, "Bah! Humbug!"

Billy made a beautiful Scrooge, crimping his pretty plump face into all sorts of dreadful wrin-

kles, shouting in a deep voice, but Roman's part was no easy matter, though he might have said it in French.

When they went upstairs for the first rehearsal, his eyes had brightened at sight of the music and words of the "Adeste Fideles," written upon the blackboard, large and plain. He and Billy were waiting at the back of the room while Bessie rehearsed her essay, and Roman Biznet, pointing a thin finger, read the words with much pride to Billy, who stared with rather doubtful respect, wondering if it might not be wicked. Then Roman showed how it went when Abbé Thevierge had showed him how in Montreal. He used a desk as an organ, playing with a rapt expression, his eyes half shut.

"Adeste fideles, laeti triumphantes,
Venite, venite, in Bethlehem."

The boys were so interested that they had not noticed the approach of a square man wearing side whiskers, spectacles, and a frock coat.

"Miss Bartlett," said this gentleman suddenly, interrupting the imagined chords that Roman was bringing about his ears, — "Miss Bartlett, — excuse me for interrupting, but I notice — ah — something remaining on the board here — ah — a sign of the previous occupants which would as well be erased before we go any further. It is as well to get these notions out of the pupils' heads as soon as possible." He patted Billy's head enthusiastically with his right hand as he spoke, and Roman's patronizingly with his left.

Miss Bartlett stopped Bessie Heathway, and came over to the Reverend Mr. Wells.

“Oh, do you think so?” she answered blandly. “Of course, I will erase it if you think best. I left it because it was so pretty, you know, and appropriate to Christmas.”

“But the Latin words” — Mr. Wells shook his head. “You might erase them and write *our* words instead, ‘Come, all ye faithful!’”

“I may as well erase it all, I think,” said Miss Bartlett quietly. “I confess I like the Latin words best myself.” And she went back to Bess and Merrie England.

Roman Biznet could not have explained just why, but he decided that he liked Miss Amy Bartlett, and wished he had not spent his last Canadian penny on parlor matches to scatter about the schoolroom floor. He would have preferred now to have bought a Christmas card for her.

But, the “*Adeste Fideles*” being erased, — exercised with the black-robed Sisters who had placed it there, — he found a new interest in giving exaggerated attention to Bessie Heathway’s essay, placing a hand to his ear and leaning forward as if with agonized suspense, while the faithless Billy giggled, he who had once been Elizabeth’s *fidus Achates*. But she was in a severe and lofty mood, taking no notice, and presently Roman had sorrows of his own.

“‘Merry Christmas, uncle!’”

“‘Bah! Humbug!’” said Billy, with a careless glibness born of many repetitions.

“‘Christmas a *humbug*, uncle! You don’t mean that, I’m sure!’” But there was lifeless uncertainty in his tone.

“You must study it, Roman,” said Miss Bartlett severely, when they had stumbled through it.

“Bah! Humbug!” said a sharp voice, as he left the building; a stinging snowball sunk into his coat collar, as the Heathway sleigh disappeared around the corner, the peak of Elizabeth’s blue toboggan cap standing out behind like a pennant; and he put his thumb to his nose, but dispiritedly, for Bess was far away, with jingling bells about her, caring nothing for a small French boy who dreaded the morrow.

The hall was brave with greens and flags — an arrangement somewhat messy, if one were critical, but enthusiastic at least, and patriotic, whatever that may mean in graded-school parlance. The town turned out in force, particularly the mothers, who brought the baby brothers and sisters to gaze, round-eyed, upon the actual grandeur of which they had heard so much. Dr. Winthrop listened with satisfaction to Bessie Heathway’s rendering of his ideas; the Reverend Mr. Wells beamed upon Benny Wells, who declaimed “Ring out the old, ring in the new,” and upon little Gladys Wells, who drooped her black eyelashes demurely as she piped a Christmas carol. Gladys was the “Beautiful Child” of the town, but Bessie Heathway called her a “nasty little thing.” Madam Tracy and her daughter, Miss Emily, were there in honor of

Billy's Scrooge, and the Heathways sat near them — Dr. Winthrop between — as was a right and proper arrangement of neighbors. Madam was very little and old, her head shaking behind her black lace veil as though in eternal negation of the things of this world. She ate peppermints, and heard nothing, but Billy was the only man-child among her posterity and she felt something of reverence for him. Miss Emily had a little of this feeling, but tempered by her nearness to modern ideas. To both, the ten-year-old Billy was head of the house, and some day he was to have whatever was left of the ancestral estate.

Miss Emily's face was long and ascetic. Perhaps her eyes were too near together and the lines about her mouth not altogether lovable, but she meant well, — none better.

Alphonsine wore a resplendent gown of black moreen that looked much like Mrs. Heathway's silk, and Kitty came, too, in a red frock dyed and made up the day before. She kept her thumb in her mouth all the while, except when she giggled out loud at Billy's "Bah! Humbug!" for she knew Billy Tracy well, having made his acquaintance in the Tracy kitchen. Billy had shared candy with her, and his aunt had given her his old out-grown stockings, which were red and very beautiful, when the feet were made smaller and a patch put on the knee. So she knew that it was only play when Billy made up faces and said, "Bah! Humbug!"

But what was the matter with Romy? He

mumbled and stared and turned white. Suddenly he put his thumb in his mouth, just the way she had hers, and there was a silence.

“I have always regarded Christmas time, apart from the reverence,” — said a disturbed voice which was not Roman Biznet’s; but he shook his head and kept his thumb in his mouth, and presently the two turned and came down from the platform, ingloriously. Alphonsine looked fierce and said something under her breath. Dr. Winthrop watched the boy with some curiosity. It was the first time he had seen him, and Amy Bartlett’s description had been interesting. The round black head beside the round yellow one, as Roman and Billy sat together in the front row, seemed of good outline, and was held up stiff and proud, as though its owner did not care particularly about the recent embarrassment. Bessie Heathway, who was sitting in front of the two, presently turned around with a wrathful face, showing that something in the way of pin-sticking and hair-pulling was going on; and the doctor, who had sympathized keenly with the boy’s failure, felt a warming toward mischief so quick in recovery, an egoism that took itself so lightly.

Billy was to have a tree on Christmas Eve, and a party of the dozen or so children of the town who were found worthy to associate with him. These were not, by any means, the mates he chose at school for himself. Roman Biznet was not among them, for instance, though Alphonsine came to

help Louise in the kitchen, and Kitty sat behind the range and pulled Susan's tail, sharing with her the lickings of the dishes in which maple sugar was boiled for the candy pull. The bubbling noise of a roomful of children laughing and talking came to her there, and when the piano played for Musical Chairs or the Virginia Reel, she kept time with her hands and feet, softly, jouncing Susan up and down until she got scratched. The door opened, just as Billy was leading Gladys Wells, with bewildering grace, down a fairy lane of children, all clapping their hands rhythmically, and Billy caught a gleam of phosphorescent black eyes peering at him as from across a gulf. Billy was always something of a fairy prince, a King Cophetua. He nodded and waved his hand at Kitty, who sucked both thumbs harder than ever and drooped her eyes behind her bang; but when the dance was over, he rushed out, resplendent in blue velvet suit and lace ruffles, and bore her back with him before Alphonsine and Louise could exclaim. She looked very tiny and conspicuous in her red gown, as she stood, demure and blinking, among fluffy white dresses and perky sash bows.

"What child is that?" asked the terrible little old lady who sat in the chimney corner and ate peppermints. Her voice was very deep, and Kitty's mouth corners quivered as she clung to Billy's hand. Miss Emily Tracy explained, deprecatingly, and Dr. Winthrop looked stern, but not at Kitty. Billy led her to him with a troubled face.

“I think it’s mean! She was out there just playing with Susan, and Aunt Em did n’t let me know! And it’s Christmas, — and — Gladys Wells, you keep quiet! Her hair is twice as long as yours.”

Bessie Heathway, scowling under a mop of light hair and blue ribbons, bent down and looked at her long and earnestly. “You Romy Biznet’s cousin?”

Kitty nodded and swallowed a lump. She wondered if they would have greeted her differently if her dress had been white like theirs, instead of red — a mist wavered about her and she burrowed her head under Billy’s blue velvet arm, which smelt sweet and was soft.

“What a pretty dress you have on! I wish mine was that color,” said Bessie Heathway. Somebody else tittered, and Billy said: “You be still, Gladys Wells.”

“You look like Roman Biznet, but I think you’re a nice little girl,” pursued Bessie; and then, with a plaintive sigh, “I wish you were my little sister.”

Kitty gathered courage once more. All this had not a condemnatory sound, and Billy was holding her hand very tight. She peered out of her blue velvet refuge and smiled at Bessie Heathway, then past her at Doctor Winthrop, who gathered her into his lap, where she sat enthroned for the rest of the evening, though the old lady shook her head in continual negation until she fell asleep and was helped off to bed by Louise. Miss Tracy,

however, murmured something about "Christmas Eve," and looked at Dr. Winthrop with a saintly smile, which he returned with a grave, searching glance, then looked from her to Kitty and the other children and Bessie, thinking, as one must who is old, about the quick passage of time and its little consequence, and that it was hard to fancy these young heads grown gray like his own.

Bessie Heathway came up to him with a confidential idea, one with which he was familiar, for no Hindoo wife prays more earnestly for a son than did Bessie for a little sister. "Her mother's poor, is n't she?"

"Yes."

"Don't you think she might give her to me?"

"I'm afraid not, Bessie. Good mothers, like Kitty's, don't give away their little girls." Kitty giggled. She could understand jokes of this nature.

Bessie looked wistful, then brightened, and whispered in his ear. He nodded emphatically, and she sped away, coming back with a waxen creature in blue silk and spangles. Its cheeks were pouched as if with mumps, its eyebrows of a supercilious expression.

"You were n't here when the things were taken off the tree," she said; "this is your doll."

"That is very sweet and thoughtful of you, Bessie," said Miss Tracy; "you shall have another."

But Bessie scowled at the toe of her slipper. She did not like to be told she was good. Kitty

accepted the doll without question, as one takes celestial gifts, not reasoning whence or why. Bessie said it was hers, and that was enough. And Alphonsine, peering anxiously through a crack in the door, turned away with her apron to her eyes. She felt, somehow, that Kitty had come to her own.

CHAPTER VIII

A MARCH MORNING

SPRING in Cosmos is not like spring elsewhere. This must be so, for if one has been a child in Cosmos and felt the rush of young blood at the time when the sap of the trees feels the same impulse, one understands, by contrast, how nerveless is the spring of other parts of the world, and its homesickness.

March is always a lion in Cosmos. It comes with great trampling and roaring of wind and water. It is not sickly and muggy, as it is a few degrees south. To be sure, it sweeps away the old and the feeble, but so great and god-like is that warm wind, that I do not see why they should mind it any more than do those few dead leaves that cling to trees all winter and only drop when young sap, and pushing buds, and the March wind dislodge them.

Madam Tracy did not seem to mind it very much when it took her away, about three o'clock, one gusty morning. She had been a rather literary soul, doting on Tennyson, though eighty-five and past the years for romance. Her daughter slept, and only Dr. Winthrop sat, wakeful, by the window, watching the hurry of black clouds, listening to the rustle of water as brown patches of earth

grew larger and the snow dwindled from ice-floes to spread-out sheets — to pocket handkerchiefs.

Suddenly Madam Tracy sat up, her white hair scanty and disheveled, her eyes bright and deep in the sickly glimmer of the night lamp. As the doctor bent over her, she quoted, with a strange air of eagerness and mystery: —

“And in the wild March morning, I heard them call my soul!”

She had been the kind of person of whom it is said: “She looks as if she would dry up and blow away.” And so it was.

That was the passing of a dead leaf. In another part of the house, things were taking place which belonged to the sap and the bud.

Generally, Billy slept like a little pig, but, owing to his grandmother's illness, somebody had been careless of him the night before and let him stow away a good third of a whole mince pie. So, he tossed about and dreamed strangely, until at last he woke, feeling quite unhappy. He believed that he was unhappy about his grandmother, and this was a natural mistake.

He went to the window, at length. There would be no more skating, he thought pensively, as he heard the roaring of the Powasket River, plunging its broken ice about somewhere on the edge of the darkness. There was something final and poetic about this ending of the skating season. It seemed to speak of the change of all things, the ceasing of joy and youth in general. His grand-

mother had missed much, not being able to skate, he thought, and now they had given him to understand she must even give up breathing.

All these things seemed strange and sad. He thought about them until he felt quite frightened, and heard sounds and saw sights in the noisy morning that could not possibly have been there.

His room being warm and his cheeks feverish with indigestion, he threw up the window and leaned out. As he did so, a faint shadow that had been dodging about among the leafless shrubs passed between him and a patch of snow. It seemed the shape of a man, going uprightly. Of its size he could not be sure, not knowing its distance, but he felt that it was watching him, it stood so still. If he had not seen it take its place in front of the snowdrift, he would have concluded that he was mistaken ; that it was the trunk of a tree.

Then it disappeared from its white background and crept nearer, while he strained his eyes painfully. It seemed to come forward and look up, with the stealthy motion of a cat. A small white patch moved to meet it, and he heard the familiar voice of Susan, his cat, giving friendly greeting to the stranger. He hardly knew whether to consider Susan a traitor or to accept the stranger as harmless upon her recommendation. He thought of burglars and glanced behind him to make sure that his grandfather's sword still hung above the mantelpiece, gleaming faintly in the firelight. When he looked out of the window again, a ray of light from the floor below had sifted out upon

the lawn, and the stranger stood within it, still uncertain of outline, but too small to be greatly feared, if human.

“I know you, Biznet,—you can’t scare me. What are you doing to my cat?”

“Come on out!”

“Yah! This is a pretty time of night! Is it a game?”

“Yes,—come on out!”

“I can’t—I— My grandmother’s sick!”

“Grandmother nawthin’! You’re afraid.”

“Do you stump me?”

“Yep. I stump you.”

Susan was languishingly rubbing herself back and forth round and about the French boy’s legs, her tail erect, her purr almost audible to Billy. She glanced up at him, with green in her eyes, and mewed knowingly. There was an undefinable air of excitement about these two, and a suggestion, borne out by the tigerish purr of running water, that there was something going on outside which one should not miss. Billy dressed with fumbling haste—a foolish toilet, completed by hanging his skates about his neck. Of course there could be no use for them, but they had stood by him all winter. It was a habit, like the wearing of a sword upon all occasions in the last century. He pulled his scarlet “tchook”—a Cosmos corruption of *toque*—over his ears, then raised it to scratch his head, perplexed.

“How’ll I get down?”

“Jump.”

“Jump your grandmother — I mean” — This had been one of his favorite oaths. There seemed something wrong with it to-night, as though it were profane.

“I can’t jump,” he amended, in savorless language.

“Climb down on your sheets.”

This was a good suggestion. Boys that ran away to sea nearly always made ropes of their bedclothes as the first step, escaping from people who treated them cruelly. His heart was soft and kind toward his aunt, his grandmother, and the servants, but instantly these changed and entered into the game, becoming ogresses, from whom escape was the wisest and noblest course. Certainly, he would run away to sea, — and be back for breakfast.

The knots held, and Billy — athlete from his cradle — made the descent with credit, though he slipped at the end on a small convex piece of rotten ice. He remembered that on the previous morning — indeed for half the winter — it had been a curled drift that obscured the dining-room window below.

At his arrival, Susan, with a buffoon’s pretense of fear, laid back her ears and tore away on a gallop about the house, to return from the other side almost before they had missed her.

“Well,” said Billy, in a business-like way, “what’s the game?”

The French boy looked reflectively at his squidgy wet shoes, at the cat, at the sky.

“I dunno,” he said finally; “it’s fun to be out in the dark, don’ you think?”

“But what do you *do*?” persisted Billy.

“Well,” in some scorn, “I don’t skate. Wha’ ’d you bring them things for?”

“D’ you mean you just walk around and don’t play anything?”

“No, I don’t. You can play anything you want to. Only it’s nicer at night. Don’t you know nothin’?”

“I played running away to sea when I came down. Let’s play that.”

“All right. Come on.”

This pleased Susan also. Night was a time for cats. The day belonged to dogs and people. But here were two sensible creatures racing off into the darkness on some delightful errand that a cat might understand. She was young and vigorous. It was her first spring. Born in the fall, her kittenhood had been drear and cold. When their progress was too slow for her, she climbed trees and waited in security, sometimes finding empty bird’s-nests that made good sniffing.

They plunged through the squelching mire of the garden, blundered into a web of raspberry brambles that yanked off Billy’s cap, then slipped and slid down the long icy slope, honeycombed with gutters, that led to the railroad track and to French Hollow beyond.

The roar of the Powasket was plainer then, and every few minutes, from far away, one heard the rasping whine of a log going through the sawmill.

They reached the track and walked along a rail, their arms outspread for balance, Susan tiptoeing in the rear. They felt the vibration of a coming train, and suggested to each other various ways of wrecking it and escaping with plunder, but it was upon them before they could lay any definite plan. Susan and Billy slipped down the embankment, but Roman Biznet danced in front of the cow-catcher, until the face of the engineer was gray with anguish, and the locomotive shrieked like a girl at a mouse.

Then he rejoined Billy, but Susan had fled ; she had not articulated with them for the hunting of such large game — supposing it was something in the way of rats and chipmunks that was in the wind.

“Now, what you goin’ to go?” asked Billy. There was some asperity in his tone. He would not have confessed it, but there had been a glamour of safety and assurance about the Biznet boy at first, which was now being replaced by something less pleasant. The very fact that he could treat the huge night with such nonchalance had something terrifying about it, not to speak of a trick of turning his head this way and that, as though he followed the motions of creatures invisible to Billy. It was growing qualmishness that caused Billy to adopt a swagger.

“Don’t you know nothin’?” he inquired, loftily.

“You see that thing over there looks like a little snowdrift?” said Roman Biznet mysteriously.

“Y-yes. ’T is a snowdrift.”

“ No, it ain’t. Don’t you see its arms ? ”

“ N-no ! ”

“ Don’t you see its hair ? ”

“ N-n-no ! ”

“ Don’t you hear it say something ? Woo-o-o, like that ? ”

“ W-what is it ? ”

“ I dunno. ”

“ My aunt does n’t let me get my feet wet, ” said Billy, with sudden dignity. “ I ’m going home. I don’t think this is a very interesting game. ”

“ You see that black thing over in the pasture ? Just this side the stone wall — ’bout ’s big ’s a dog ? ”

“ That’s a bush. You can’t fool me. I ’ve picked raspberries there in summer. ”

“ It ’s behind the bush ! ”

“ What is ? ”

“ Never mind. You might be scared. ”

“ I ain’t scared, but I ’m going home. M-my aunt does n’t like to have me play with French boys. ”

“ All right. My aunt does n’t like to have me play with Yankee boys, either. You better run. It ’s comin’. It ’s a loup-garou ! ”

And Billy ran. His aunt had repeatedly told him the loup-garou was a myth. Louise, and Phosy Conto, who often visited their kitchen, thought differently. He did not know exactly how he reached the house.

There was a light in the dining-room window, and he peeped in before making the ascent of his

swinging sheets. His aunt lay upon a lounge; Louise, disheveled and sleepy-looking, was bathing her temples. Dr. Winthrop stood by the bright wood fire and poured hot water into a glass of some liquid that gleamed like a ruby. The door which opened into the grandmother's room was shut.

He climbed up his knotted sheets, what sound he made being lost in the universal slatting and rustling of branches and shutters, and, constructing a muddy rat's nest of his disordered bedding, curled up to sleep. And in his dreams the Biznet boy led him into many adventures and through many troubles.

CHAPTER IX

THE LORD INDICATES A DUTY FOR MISS TRACY

THE Tracy parlors were large and dim ; filled with things that had once been treasures, but were become faded and out of date, like the shriveled petals in a rose-jar. The carpets were soft, deeply piled, patterned with huge roses, that had been crimson fifty years ago, but which Time had brought to brick-dust and gray. The furniture was of crimson corded silk, but Time had inconsiderately made it an acrid magenta that fretted at the brick-red roses, once so congenial,—just as people, once matching delightfully, sometimes fade into a grumpy discord. It's all in the dye. Under the buttons of the chairs there was still a gleam of crimson as evidence of past splendor.

On the walls, whose crimson stripe had faded in still a different way, hung family portraits. Not *post mortem* crayons, such as one finds in other Cosmos homes, but "real oil paintings." Stiff men, with curly topknots and bristly shirt frills. Smiling ladies, who wore their hair over their ears, and always kept one hand flatly holding folds of lace in such a way as to show its elaborate pattern and display to the best advantage remarkably pointed finger tips. They wore

many jewels, too, each with a careful high light in the middle to indicate its brilliancy. There were suggestions of a Tracy who had been to far countries — a curved sword in a strangely carved scabbard, a Japanese lady embroidered in high relief upon a banner, traveling one way upon impossible feet while her impossible face looked another, a tea-set of bronze from Benares, to whose ornament a lifetime may have gone. Hanging in the arched doorway that led to the dining-room was a wedge-shaped piece of brass, a gong that had once hung in a Burmese temple and summoned dark-skinned heathen to prayer with a high, wavering voice, ethereal, plaintive, of another world. Now it called the Tracy family to meals.

Between the tall windows, shaded by a veranda roof like an old-fashioned poke bonnet, stood a square piano of antique pattern. One would have expected its voice to be cracked and jangling, like the colors of the room, but here was a touch of youth and harmony. The case was old, but the strings and action were new and good.

It was sentiment, and not poverty, that prevented Miss Emily Tracy from rejuvenating the room throughout. She loved to keep things as they had been in her childhood; to see, in the pier glass, that her own face faded in equal ratio. She was a contemplative, shy soul, loving those who had died years before better than any one who lived, — even Billy, her brother's little boy. Billy's sister was still abroad somewhere, with relatives. Miss Tracy very much feared that it was her duty

to have her come home and live with her and Billy. She had been thinking about it for a year now, and wondering what the Lord wanted her to do about it. Miss Tracy always preferred letting the Lord decide things for her to taking the initiative herself. Women who have no man in the family to direct them are given to this pious habit. And, if the devil's instruments do not get hold of their worldly goods, it is surprising how well they get along.

The truth was that she did not like her niece, who had been a rude, selfish child the last time Miss Tracy had seen her, some ten years before. Miss Tracy always meant to do her duty. There had been duty enough and to spare while her mother lived, but now the world seemed curiously vacant and still, without the sound of that querulous voice; she felt uneasy, as though this new idleness were a sin. The Lord must have a duty for her somewhere; she wished that He would be explicit. Must she send for Maud? And then Billy would give his allegiance to his sister instead of to her. Perhaps that would not be best for Billy. She wished she knew.

After sending her nephew to bed, Miss Tracy was fond of playing on her old piano, particularly during summer evenings, lit only by late sunsets, or the later shimmer of moonlight, delicate, rippling things which rarely obliged her to lift her foot from the soft pedal. She had been taught well in her youth. There was a tradition that she had talent.

There is unrest and sadness in the odor of roses for all but those too young to understand the transient nature of what is pleasant. On this June evening, as Miss Tracy sat at the piano in the twilight, the odor of the rose garden came to her through the open windows, and her eyes were wet. Playing so softly that she could still hear the long sigh of the wind in the grass, to her blurred vision there seemed a shadow lurking by a pillar, small and stealthy; and, looking more intently, it took on human shape. She kept on with her music as she stared, and presently it crept nearer, until its head was silhouetted in the window frame.

“I think you might let me at it, once,” said a small, hoarse voice.

“What?”

“I ain’t touched a piano since we left Montreal. Abbé Theverge used to let me.”

“Who are you?”

“I sh’d think you might know me by this time, even if you don’t let Billy bring me into the house. I’m Roman Biznet. Phosy Conto is my aunt, and I ain’t touched a piano for more than a year.”

“Well!”

“I would n’t hurt it none. I know that piece you were just playing. Won’t you let me try?”

It had been Schubert’s “Serenade.” He scrambled over the window-sill and stood by the keyboard, looking up at her. There was an indescribable luminosity about his eyes. She felt

uncomfortably that she was seen better than she could see.

“If you will play softly” —

The goblin sprang to the vacated piano stool with a chuckle of delight. He stretched out his hands, drew them back, twisting and rubbing his fingers, and gently rippled a few scales up and down; then, with a touch so light that some of the keys did not respond, he whispered over a part of the music that she had been playing. But this he abandoned and fell to trying chords and scales.

“’T ain’t in tune,” he said presently.

“It was tuned last week,” said Miss Tracy, in feeble remonstrance. Her accurate ear was her pride. He struck a chord that jangled slightly.

“I suppose it’s too damp for it near the window,” she admitted reluctantly.

“I’ve got a make-believe piano over to Phosy’s. I marked it out on the window-sill. But you get tired of pretending all the time.”

Miss Tracy stared stupidly. Since when had a small French boy, of mongrel ancestry, been discovered eating his heart out for such a thing as a piano? Since when had a creature of this sort contained more soul than could be satisfied by a comb with paper over it, or a mouth-organ? The small fingers were wandering over the keys, gaining firmness with every touch.

“The Abbé used to play this a lot,” he said, fumbling at the solemn chords of Chopin’s “Funeral March.” “I can remember it, but I

can't play it. I wish you'd do it. You don't play as well as the Abbé, but I'd like to hear it again."

She played it for him, and when she had finished looked anxiously at her listener. She had played it well, and her dignity began to reassert itself.

"You didn't do it as well as the Abbé," he complained. Then he squatted down at her feet, with the air of a bargain-maker ready for a long bicker.

"Say, you lemme play on your piano sometimes, and I know something I'll do for you!"

"Well?"

"I won't steal any of your apples when they're ripe, and I'll keep the other boys away, too."

"Humph!"

"Ain't that worth something? I heard one of 'em saying how he got ten dollars' worth last year."

"You did, did you?"

"And another one got enough potatoes out of the field next the track to last all winter, just by digging round the roots and leaving the tops standing!"

"I suspected as much."

"I could keep 'em away from there, too."

"Indeed? How?"

"Scare 'em! They're easy to scare. But say — would n't that be worth while?"

"Perhaps."

"I would n't hurt the piano none. I'd be just as

careful, and not play loud. Billy could stay in the room to see I did n't steal anything."

"Of course you can come — and I'll give you lessons — and you shall be a musician, and — and — Oh, run away home now! I want to think."

He disappeared promptly into the night, and Miss Tracy went to bed with a happy and thankful heart, because the Lord had pointed out a duty so interesting.

A genius! And she would give him to the world!

CHAPTER X

BESSIE HEATHWAY'S ANXIETIES

A WEEK or so after the close of school, on a sultry July morning which had withered the purple and pink morning-glories before they were fairly open, Bess Heathway was rolling a hoop languidly in front of her father's house. She wore a pink starched dress, the inside seams of which scratched her thin arms and bony neck until she was exceedingly cross, without knowing why. Her heavy crimped hair hung hot and moist about her shoulders.

Billy Tracy had not been near her since school closed, although she could plainly see him, day after day, from her windows capering about the Tracy grounds. Miss Tracy let him bring that Biznet boy to her house. They were together all the time; Mamma Heathway said it was a shame, and if she were Emily Tracy she'd no more have a ragged French Catholic young one in the house, corrupting Billy's morals and stealing things, than — well, than anything. And who knows what ideas he might give Billy on religion? She wondered if Miss Tracy was going to turn Catholic herself. She had been seen to bow to Father Labelle in broad daylight!

Bessie crossly batted her hoop about, keeping

one eye toward the big house on the hill. Billy sometimes went for a ride on his pony. It was a pretty pony.

The pony and Billy came not, but presently she saw down the street, under the archway of elms, another figure, coming at a rapid trot. It was smaller than Billy, but quite as well dressed, — dressed, indeed, so much like him that it might have been his twin brother, — scarlet stockings, scarlet tie, straw hat with scarlet band. She leaned her arms and chin on her hoop and waited, staring scornfully as this new boy approached.

“Oh, Romy Biznet! ’fore I’d wear other folks’ old clo’s! Oh, Romy Biznet,” she chanted, in that singsong which all children in the world know without being taught.

He turned upon her with a wicked gleam in his eyes. She spat at him, like a spiteful kitten at a puppy.

“You need n’t watch for Billy to go by,” he said, “him and me are goin’ fishing. Besides, the horse is goin’ to be shod. You might wait and see the horse if you want.”

He put his thumb to his nose, and Bessie went into the house, howling. She was coming down with the measles anyway, and the world was a dreary place, at best. The Biznet boy kept on up the hill.

Bessie Heathway, with the heaviness of all the world’s sorrows in her sobs, could hear the Tracy piano banging away nearly all the rest of the morning. Her head ached. Papa Heathway let

her come into the library and look at the great tome called "Dante's Inferno." She was almost forgetting her troubles in those delightful horrors of Doré, when Mamma Heathway came in and took it away.

"The very idea! To let the child have such a book," whereupon Bessie began to cry again, and utterly refused her "St. Nicholas," some bright bits of cloth for dolls' dresses, even the loan of her father's mathematical instruments. She wandered tragically out to the barn, and crawled to the hay chute, pretending that it was the pit at whose bottom lay Satan, eating up Judas, crunching his little bones, just as one crunches the legs of those yellow-red crabs that come with oysters. Satan was Pegasus, the squire's old blooded Arabian, nuzzling with his pink nose to see if any oats happened to have been mixed with his hay by mistake. Bess lay gloomily on the edge of this abyss and fed him wisps of fresh hay, pretending that they were sinners by the name of Biznet. Presently, feeling the need of a confidant, she went over to Dr. Winthrop.

Did you ever notice what a queer, nice smell there is about clean children? Particularly in a little girl's hair. Take one in your lap and rest your nose gently on the top of her head, taking care that she does n't bump up like a guinea pig, and give you a nosebleed. It is partly soap, partly crimping irons, partly perspiration, and partly her own young deliciousness; but it is as real as the fragrance of those maligned flowers which we

claim have no odor because our noses are not fine enough to perceive it.

Dr. Winthrop loved to rub his cheek against Bessie's head while she sat in his lap. She was getting rather long-legged for it now, and awkward. The little man was really too weak and sick to have great, half-grown children sprawling over him. He would not have allowed a patient of his to be bothered so.

"But Bessie," he was saying in amused perplexity, "I don't think Romy Biznet is a bad boy. You — you nag him, my child. Men critters never like to be nagged. And as for smoking — of course he ought not to, if Miss Tracy has forbidden it, but between you and me, if a man is fond of his pipe — why don't you lecture me about smoking? It's bad for me."

"That 's different."

"Well, perhaps it is. I daresay it is. Will you hand me down that box of cigars? Thanks. Smell 'em. Does n't it make you wish you were a man? Ah!"

Bess always had the weight of the world on her shoulders, from the time before she could walk alone, when she tried to make two puppies, eating scraps from the same dish, respect a dividing line through its exact centre.

"Well," she said, with a mature frown, "it's Billy I'm worried about."

The doctor choked slightly behind his cigar. "Why, what's wrong with Billy?" he asked, unsteadily. Bess, who was leaning against him, turned around with suspicion.

"You need n't laugh," she said sternly.

"I was thinking of something I read yesterday," he murmured, discreetly. "But what did you say was wrong with Billy?"

"I saw him smoking the Biznet boy's pipe yesterday," said poor Bess, and leaned her head upon her hands.

"And — and did it make him sick?" asked the doctor, sympathetically.

"I don't know. I guess probably. That's what comes of having a French Catholic young one in the house." She sighed tragically. The doctor, combing her long crimped locks with his yellow fingers, pondered deeply.

"Well," he said at length, "I guess I'll talk to the boys a little. It isn't very good for them, and that's the truth. Romy is n't a bad fellow, though; I would n't worry about him and Billy. Why, my dear, don't tell anybody, but Romy will be a famous man some day. Don't offend him now. We shall all be proud to say we knew him, in a few years."

CHAPTER XI

FAMEUSE APPLES — AND THE LOUP-GAROU.

THE Fameuse apples were in their prime. Now there is something about a Fameuse apple which, if one has ever known and loved it, makes all other apples meaningless and stale forever. The Fameuse apple is cool, even while it lies with its crimson cheek to the September sun. It is juicy beyond all other juiciness. It is white and crisp, and in its red skin there is romance. If a tooth once pierces its deliciousness, no dream of a happy life can be dreamed that does not make a liberal allowance for Fameuse apples. Therefore, it is well to keep a watchful eye upon any tree which one is fortunate enough to own. Otherwise the crop is prone to fail.

The potatoes were ready to dig, but slept a little longer, sluggard-like, being very well off where they were. The corn still stood bravely in regiments and battalions, though beginning to look a bit seedy and out at elbows. The hops were green and dusty and pungent, until you could n't rest for the tantalizing suggestion of Beer to Be.

Roman Biznet considered these things, as he set out late one Saturday afternoon from the Tracy house, carrying a particularly grateful and melodious little heart in his bosom, for Miss Tracy had

warmed to him beyond the point of good judgment, letting her golden opinion of his future shine to sultriness upon his hopes. He bethought him that it was time for the payment which he had promised for his tuition.

On the Santwire side of Phosy's fence, Adlor Santwire and some bigger boys, supposed to be unutterably evil and worldly because they had not been in school for a year or two, and because their changing voices sounded strange and foreign in the twanging French words which school children were forbidden to use — Adlor and his friends used to range themselves with their backs to this board fence and swap lies and smoke immoral corn-cob pipes, with tobacco from their own back yards, and plan whatever of infamy was within the compass of their intellects. At first Rome joined them, but when Miss Tracy made him stop smoking, a feeling that he was small and limited kept him to himself. Yet, loving the smell of their pipes and the pleasant sensation of eavesdropping, he was fond of curling up in the softest of Kitty's architectural efforts in the hen's behalf to pass an indolent hour or two after supper.

He had filled his pockets with Fameuse apples as he went through the Tracy orchard. In fact, habit had so overcome him that he had stuffed about half a peck between his shirt and himself before his sense of honor asserted itself. Then, nobody having seen him, when he thought of Alphonsine and Kitty it hardly seemed worth while to unload. Particularly as he remembered how

fond Miss Tracy was of him, and was practically certain that she would have given them to him if she had happened to think of it.

So he ate Fameuse apples and watched the little stars come out, and listened to Adlor and his friends. The world seemed a very comfortable place. Alphonsine, clattering dishes about, was singing in a high nasal voice; Kitty, sent to bed, sat on the window-sill in her pink calico nightie, swinging her bare feet and eating her Fameuse apples, the cores of which she threw at Rome as fast as they were nibbled down. But Rome had become too interested in the conversation on the other side of the fence to throw anything back. His jaws were motionless; his eyes were bright with attention.

Presently Adlor and his cronies departed, talking among themselves in the mumbling way of evil-doers. Rome still sat, with his jaws fixed in the action of biting, thinking deeply. Presently he finished his bite with a sharp champ of satisfaction and rose stiffly, nodding portentously to himself.

There was no moon that night, but the stars were fair. A little wind whispered ghost stories to itself, shivering among the dark trees at its own inventions, making sudden panic runs of terror through the orchard, then sitting down abruptly, panting, whispering to itself again, making ready for another burst.

Its fidgeting was disconcerting. One could not hear whether a footstep might not be sounding

beside one in the dark, or if a creature breathing stertorously, shrank against a tree trunk that it might not brush against the passer-by.

But the darkness was sweet with apples, and one could see their fair round bodies against the sky, cheek by cheek with the stars. One had only need to shake the tree to bring them plumping all about, like frightened frogs jumping into a pond. Then, in the invisible wet grass, one could find them by touch and smell.

Enter three long black figures, stepping softly, breathing tenderly. Only a cat or a creature with cat's eyes could have seen them at all in that obscurity. A cat would have perceived that each carried an empty flour sack, that their black eyes were wide and peering.

“Qui va là?” muttered a startled voice.

“’T wan’t nothin’.”

“Did n’t you hear some one snicker?”

“Naw.”

Yet to all three it seemed that some light, swift body crept side by side with them, stopping when they stopped, holding its breath, peering about tree trunks, taking advantage of each fresh gust of wind to perform some mysterious and fearful evolution under cover of the trees’ rustling. But the apples were sweet, and the boys were brave as French boys go.

Adlor seized a branch and shook it, looking over his shoulder the while; his companions gathered with skillful rapidity, unheeding the apples that struck their heads and shoulders.

But, suddenly, all three stood erect in frozen attitudes of fear. It was four-footed. It had two eyes that shone — shone with blue and wavering flames, like sulphur matches moistened and rubbed in the dark. It looked at them.

“G-g-g-good doggie,” said Adlor. A low growl answered them, a growl that carried with it the unspeakable horror of a human voice. A human growl, a four-footed beast, phosphorescent eyes. It was most certainly the loup-garou, a beast rarely seen, but only too common in this region.

Adlor could only gasp, “Loup-garou!” Charlie Orleana sent forth one howl of mortal terror, Pete Premo shivered out a Pater Noster, and they ran. They stumbled, they sobbed, they prayed, and the Thing came after. As they reached the fence and were about to scramble over it, like fleeing cats, Adlor glanced behind, and with one awful yell fainted dead away. The loup-garou was outlined in that instant against the starlit sky, and was seen to be running on two legs like a man, its flaming eyes, as big as silver dollars, still blazing where, if it had been a man, its forehead would have been. It was this awful upright posture, its clear outline, and its Eyes that Adlor saw last when he fell. When he opened his eyes, blankly, he was being pinched and patted by small strong fingers, and a rather scared voice was saying: “Wake up, you old fool, you Johnny Crapaud, you. Don’t you play your monkey tricks on me!”

“Loup-garou,” stuttered Adlor, sitting up and looking wildly around.

“Loo which? There ain’t been no girl here. I heard some hollerin’ and seen you three fellers runnin’ like something was chasing you. I stood by, and pretty soon ’long came a funny-lookin’ dog.”

“Loup-garou,” said Adlor.

“Naw! It was ole Heathway’s Bose. W’at you doin’ in Miss Tracy’s orchard, anyway? Run home to your ma and ask her not to let the ghostses at you! Baby!”

Adlor rose giddily and got feebly over the fence. When Rome saw that he could walk, it seemed such a pity to waste good material prepared, that he said, craning as much of his face as possible through the pickets, “Maybe it *was* a loup-garou!”

Adlor groaned and staggered on.

“Maybe Miss Tracy’s got one to keep thieves out of her orchard!”

“Loup-garou,” repeated poor Adlor.

“There’s somethin’ comin’ now! I hear ’em!”

Adlor broke into a feeble run. Just before he disappeared over the railroad track, a dismal shriek rent the air — wild, unearthly — and then a piercing, wailing voice which reached even the still fleeing Pete and Charlie: —

“Oh, Adlor! Oh, mon vieux!

Adlor Santwire, tout perdu!”

And while Adlor, having gained the ruddy kitchen, was having an hysterical fit at the feet of his scared old mother, Roman Biznet, having found a corn-cob pipe lost by the trio, was trying

vainly to light it with some wet matches, of which he had his pockets full. They smelt of brimstone and glowed with blue flame as had the eyes of the loup-garou. He polished his forehead with his coat sleeve, and it glimmered faintly. His cap had been pulled down over his brow when he ministered to the fallen Adlor.

At last a match, drier than the rest, sputtered into flame. He lit his pipe, which was still half full, and smoked, his head thrown back, his eyes half shut. He rose at last, when the corn-cob had nearly followed the tobacco to ashes, and sauntered homeward, having loaded one of the half-full bags of apples on his shoulder. He would tell Miss Tracy there were two thieves and show her the two bags. There was no need to mention so small a matter as the third thief and his bag.

As he passed the Heathway woods, he saw a man. The man was smoking and his pipe lit up his face. It was so dark that even Roman Biznet's cat-like eyes would not have recognized him if it had not been for that ruddy glow.

The boy stopped short, dropping his bag of apples; for an instant his heart beat so queerly that he feared he might flop over as Adlor had done at sight of the loup-garou. The man was leaning pensively against a tree, his hands in his pockets. At his feet was a small, dark thing that might have been a dog except that it was so still. He looked around mildly as Rome stopped, and said pleasantly:—

“ Well, son ? ”

“What you doin’ here?” asked the boy sternly.

Antoine replied with a shrug. The shrug is a gesture which, in its primitive essence, means shaking a burden from the shoulders. Responsibility for his own actions was a burden with which Antoine Biznet would have nothing to do. “How do I know?”

Roman Biznet cursed his father profusely, both in French and English. Antoine listened humbly, but tipped a sly wink of parental pride to the stars.

“An’ now you’re comin’ to Phosy again, and what do you think she’ll do to you?”

Antoine shrugged again. Responsibility for other people’s actions was even less to his taste than responsibility for his own. But this small tempest of a son seemed to need pacifying.

“Oh, I ain’t going to stop here,” he said soothingly, and picked up the violin case. “Come on into the woods a bit. I’m going to play.”

He led the way through the dense, crisp darkness of the woods to where a lively little brook was churning away, Undine fashion, throwing out gleams of white foam from its obscurity. If the eyes of the two had not been rarely good, they must have broken their necks a dozen times in tripping over fallen logs, or plunging into miry muck beds. One would have thought it a terrible place for the violin to take cold in her brown throat. But if Antoine had the whim to play in a damp wood by a splashing stream, she must serve him as he liked, whatever befell glue or cat-gut.

"I'm taking lessons now," Rome confided during a lull.

Antoine peered sideways at him, and nodded sharply. "Violin?" he asked.

"Piano."

Antoine made a face and shrugged. "Bah! A piano is a horse that goes trot, trot, trot, as his master wills. A violin is a woman that can be made to cry. Piano — tum — tum — tum — tiddle diddle!" The violin shrieked with derisive laughter. Rome hung his head.

"Well," he said sadly, "piano is all Miss Tracy knows. It's better 'n nothin', ain't it?"

"Oh, oui."

Antoine played half the night, and when he had finished was so restored to his own self-esteem and had so plunged his son into nonentity that he sent the lad home with a vainglorious box on the ear, which Rome accepted without protest, stumbling home dumbly, his ears ringing with many sounds.

Phosy was still up with some promised work, steeped in red dye to her elbows, wet red draperies hanging throughout the kitchen. She was tired and fierce.

"My — my! You one bad boy! W'ere you been? You mighty lucky the loup-garou ain' got you! Adlor Santwire seen one. You get to bed, toute suite!"

CHAPTER XII

“UNNECESSARY”

THE next Monday was the first day of school. Miss Kitty Conto was to go to school for the first time. She was to enter the Blackboard Class and be the littlest one in a shrill row that lined up several times a day to consider such cabalistic propositions as —

I have a cat.	$1 + 1 = 2$
I have a man.	$1 + 2 = 3$
I have a dog.	$1 + 3 = 4$

She was to balk at the very first statement, refusing, even for the sake of argument, to assume that she had a cat, confiding to the hilarious school that she “had n’t nothin’ but an ole hen.” She was to be suppressed and to weep, but at present she had no foretaste of these sorrows. Even being stood in a corner — a ceremony that Rome described menacingly at great length, once in English, once in French — savored of joy and romance to her heated imagination. It is always so when one starts out in life. Whatever does become of that rainbow halo, I wonder?

Alphonsine was even more excited than Kitty. It was in some ways the greatest event of her own life. She clattered about with pins, dye-pots,

fried pork and onions, all at once. The milk pitcher had been used previously in mixing a blue dye, and enough had settled in the cracks of the glazing to discolor many successive quarts of milk, though the dose of aniline was practically so small as to be innocuous. Kitty's bread and milk had a brilliancy of color which she found extremely pleasing.

While she ate, Alphonsine stood behind her chair, braiding her hair in two slim braids, which would have been quite thick but for the enormous bang, starting halfway back on her crown and falling roughly down in her eyes.

Alphonsine took this opportunity to deliver a long, comprehensive and emphatic lecture on the behavior to be expected from a little girl whose ancestors were "Paris French" and who was wearing for the first time a beautiful new red gown, red stockings, and black ankle-ties; also red ribbons in her hair.

"Always say 'Yes, ma'am' and 'No, ma'am.' Keep your arms folded and your toes turned out. Don' let 'em tink you 're one li'l' Irish gal. Tell 'em your grandpap was Paris French, but don' say it right off firs' ting. Sit nice an' quiet till some *nice* li'l' gals ask you to play wid 'em. Don' play wid no common li'l' washwoman's gals."

"You was a washwoman once," piped Kitty, her voice sounding hollow within her bowl of bread and milk. There was a last pale blue crumb for which her tongue was angling. Alphonsine smacked her.

“An’ you, Roman, you take care of Kitty now, w’at I tole you!”

As the two trudged off, apparently none the worse for blue interiors, Rome looked back and saw Alphonsine standing in the doorway, shading her eyes with her hands. The sun distorted her face curiously, as if with pain or fear.

Having deposited Kitty in the primary department, he promptly sought his teacher and informed her, in the pained tone of virtue common to liars, that his aunt wanted him excused for that day to help her. The teacher was new and unsuspecting. She even looked sympathetic as she gave permission, and he betook himself quietly to the autumn woods, partly to get in another day of vacation, partly on business of his own, which was to find out whether Antoine had gone, as he had promised.

He found the spot where Tony had sat and played to him on the Saturday night previous; it was marked by ashes from his father’s pipe and an inch or two of discarded catgut. Farther on, chicken feathers and corn-cobs, scattered about a blackened cairn of stones, reminded him of the trail of their exodus from Canada the year before.

It had been pleasant, on the whole; that is, not pleasant, exactly, with that memory of Phœbe in her shallow grave and the feeling that she might burrow her way out and come after them with awful swiftness, dead leaves and black earth mixed with her hair and fallen in her eyes; but aside from that, there was always a tang of sweetness

about the memory of that journey as long as he lived. And did n't he know just how good those chickens must have tasted as Antoine cooked them? He hoped it might have been the Heathway roost that had suffered, but, on considering the feathers, found they matched the Tracy buff cochins, and was sorry.

Prowling along the edges of the stream, poking his fingers into the doorways of moles and chipmunks, teasing spiders to the pitch of murder, unraveling the mechanism of empty birds' nests, he began to feel that eyes were watching him somewhere from within a prehistoric forest of frost-nipped brakes the other side of the brook.

The mutter of water among the stones lay like a fog between his ears and all other sounds. There might have been stealthy footsteps and voices everywhere. So he sat down, cross-legged, and matched his eyes against the invisible stare. His face was as vacant as that of a toad pointing at a fly, but his heart thumped disagreeably. He wondered if Adlor had felt like that when he saw the loup-garou. He hoped that he had.

When he had looked for so long that the spot where his eyes were focused began to radiate little painful fires, a sudden laugh cut through the noise of the stream; the brakes shook, and Antoine's head rose slowly from their middle. As the morning sunlight slanted across his eyes, little disks of rose-colored fire glimmered where the pupils should have been black. He smiled amiably.

“Come here, you devil’s brat!”

The boy perceived, with a feeling of discouragement, that something had dissipated his father’s dreamy, compliant mood; that he had become ferociously good-humored and insubordinate. Stumbling across a broken brown glass bottle, when he had crossed the stream with an agile jump or two, he understood the reason.

He stood before Antoine, his legs braced to meet any attack; his eyes narrowed to slits. Antoine took one of his son’s ears between his thumb and finger, wagging the boy’s head backward and forward in a sort of lazy caress. With a quick motion, Rome sunk his sharp little teeth into his father’s wrist, crunching until he tasted blood in his mouth.

Antoine roared with laughter, not flinching in the least from the pain.

“Take your ear, Romy, and give me back my wrist, what’s left of it. Say, I’m going to see Phosy. Don’t you think she’ll be glad to see me?”

“Better not,” said Rome, grimly, spitting out his father’s blood. “She’ll do worse’n that to you!”

“Oh,” said Antoine, placidly, licking the small wound as a cat licks its paw, “I don’t mind a little thing like that. Kisses are a matter of taste.”

“You better keep clear of her,” said Roman again.

“But why?”

“You’re drunk, an’ too big a fool to know it. D’you suppose she’s forgotten about your killing Ma by this time? Well, she ain’t!”

“Has not! I thought you were going to school. Guess you ran away, did n’t you? Better trot back again. Only bad boys play truant. I notice you had fried pork and onions for breakfast. I’ll go and see if Phosy’s got any left.”

He turned away toward French Hollow.

“She won’t give you anything, you darned old drunk Crapaud!”

“Oh, I guess she will,” replied Antoine, as he disappeared in the underbrush.

Rome threw several stones at the point where his father had vanished, and with that action washed his hands of him. For a little longer he wandered aimlessly about the woods, but his soul was disturbed; the trees twisted themselves into goblin shapes and made faces at him with their seamy bark, the wind growled menacingly in their tops, the brook chattered some terrible story that he could not understand; by degrees fright possessed him, and he ran out of the woods in a panic almost as disgraceful as that which had driven Adlor, Pete, and Charlie from the orchard.

Recess was just over; he reached his seat at the last clang of the gong. Miss Johnson, the new teacher, was organizing the geography class when he tiptoed to his seat, the room being in that buzzing, snuffling, after-recess silence, when lungs are still full of oxygen and the air is restless with left-over animal spirits.

Miss Johnson was a pale, nervous little creature, a normal-school product, much inclined to believe the best of her pupils and of the rough world in general, and to blame herself when other people went wrong. The importance of an animated manner had been impressed upon her, and she wore a nervous conciliatory smile, which was apt to be overlooked in favor of a chronic frown. That she tried all sorts of cosmetics, massage, and what not, for this scar of time, availed her nothing. It was a poor day that some one who had her welfare at heart did not take her aside and lecture her more or less sternly on her expression.

Amy Bartlett had been a scoffer and a cynic on the subject of any goodness whatever among school children, with the result that the good-natured contempt of her keen, dark face had kept her little mob in pretty fair subjection, with one or two exceptions.

Miss Johnson smiled doubtfully at Roman Biznet as he tiptoed to his seat and sat down meekly with folded arms.

“We were talking about Colorado,” she said, in a tone that admitted the tardy youngster to equality with herself and caused wickedness and egotism to bubble up within him.

“Benny Wells, why do you think we should be particularly interested in Colorado to-day?”

Benny Wells, the minister’s son, grew pink in the ears as he stood up and said: “‘Cause, well, Miss Bartlett’s went there.”

“‘Has gone,’ Benny, not ‘has went.’ I wonder,

now, if any one can tell me by what railroad Miss Bartlett went to Colorado. Can you, Roman Biznet?"

"By the Central Vermont."

"But would the Central Vermont take her all the way? Bessie Heathway, what can you tell us about it?"

But Bessie Heathway had for some reason turned red and sullen. Her chest heaved and she broke the end of her slate pencil in the ink-well, then burst out gustily, with many tears: "I — I — d-don't think it's nice to talk about Miss Bartlett's going off to Denver, w-when we all know w-why she went, and maybe she'll die of c-consumption, and never come back! She was my m-most particular friend!" Bessie rushed from the room with a dismal whoop.

Miss Johnson, bewildered and vexed, remembered then that Amy had solemnly warned her against Bessie Heathway. She did the best thing possible under the circumstances.

"Perhaps we would all feel better for a little music," she said.

"Bessie Heathway is the only one that can play the organ," said Roman Biznet, with the air of one ready to stand by and assist with valuable counsel.

"I think I know a boy that plays," said Miss Johnson, archly.

"Me? I don't play. Bess Heathway would lift the hair all off me!"

Miss Johnson looked sternly at her black-eyed

counsellor. “Go to the organ, Roman Biznet. We will sing from page 57.”

He shrugged his little shoulders and went, his cat-like smile unchanging, scuffing his feet. At first he planned to make the organ do strange things and tangle up everybody in a discordant, timeless snare of sounds, but vanity came to his rescue, and he finally did as well as he knew how. They sang:—

“Think gently of the erring one,
And let us not forget,
However darkly stained by sin,
He is our brother yet.”

Then they all felt better, and Bess Heathway returned from the cloak-room, sniffing and red-nosed, but peaceful, and forgiving Miss Johnson with a watery smile as she reached her seat, but baleful-eyed when she saw the Biznet boy’s bristle of black hair above the organ.

At noon, Rome and Kitty sat under the big elm, where was the only spot of grass in the playground, and shared their luncheon from the same tin pail, while Kitty chattered and giggled enthusiastically about the nice little girls and boys in her class, not mentioning her first *faux pas* in connection with “I have a cat.”

He did not tweak her long, black braid, nor drop ants down her back, but sat with meditative scowl. His fright in the woods had suggested work for Miss Tracy’s piano,—something that should ripple like the brook and thunder in the bass with dreadful suggestions. He took his

slate, ruling it from top to bottom in bars of five lines, covering them with notes in pairs, like rabbit tracks.

"Make a picture of a little girl," said Kitty, breathing into his ear and leaning heavily on his shoulder.

"Those are all little girls running down the road to school," he explained, craftily.

"Make their arms and legs."

"There they are," he answered, pointing to some eighth and sixteenth notes.

"Let me make a little girl."

"No, sir! You let it alone! There's a nice little girl coming," he added, wickedly, as he looked up and saw Bessie Heathway coming over the grounds. "Go and ask her to play with you."

Kitty promptly jumped up and ran toward the stiff pink gingham figure. Rome watched from the corners of his eyes, with an evilly expectant grin, which changed to amazement as the unapproachable Bess Heathway swung Kitty into the air to kiss her, produced a piece of ribbon from her pocket, and harnessing Kitty as a horse, proceeded to drive that spirited animal about the now rapidly filling playground.

Rome grunted and returned to his rabbit tracks. They would not do his bidding, however, so he smeared them out, and lay back, with his hat over his face, thinking the sounds he could not write. His rest was broken by Billy Tracy sitting down upon his head and then apologizing profusely.

"You're getting too funny!" growled Rome, trying to resuscitate his hat.

“Bess Heathway seems to like Kitty better than she does you,” mused Billy.

“What do I care!” growled Rome. “She’s a — a codfish” — it was the most uncomplimentary term that occurred to him — “a salt codfish,” he repeated, relishingly.

A number of girls were playing “Miss Jinny O’Jones.” Kitty acted the part of the versatile Jinny, while Bess chanted the responses of the sympathetic neighbor: —

“We’ve come to see Miss Jinny O’Jones,
 And how is she to-day?”
 “Washing.”
 “That’s very good for Jinny O’Jones;
 We’ll call another day.”

And so on until the reply that Jinny is dead, when the query anxiously turns upon the color to bury her in. While this part of the game was going on, however, Kitty’s red legs began to kick violently, and sitting up, she declared vehemently that she was n’t dead and never would be, and she would n’t wear anything but red anyhow. Whereupon half the girls began to scold, and the other half said she should play at being their little girl. This suited her perfectly, and she was joyously receiving her fifth spanking at the hands of her third mother when the gong sounded.

Rome, thinking comfortably that a weight of responsibility had been lifted from his shoulders, returned to his rabbit tracks under the shelter of his geography.

The afternoon droned away. A cicada outside

the door whetted his scythe and the teacher's nerves. Bess Heathway went to sleep with her head on her arm, and Rome, turning about, filled her lax palm with torn paper, and pulled the hair-pins out of her topknot; growing bolder, he even purloined her pink ribbon, and was unbraiding her hair amid the approving grins of all the school when Bess stirred, and he returned studiously to his slate. Presently he felt the point of a pin pressing into the back of his neck. He gave no sign. It kept on until it drew blood, and then was withdrawn. "You felt it just the same!" said a wrathful whisper in his ear.

He was turning about with a languishing look when the teacher rapped sharply. The hands of the clock pointed to quarter to four. Bess went to the organ, and the school marched out to the thin strains of the "Titus March."

Rome found Kitty crying at the door of her class-room. "There's a li'l gal says my mamma's a washwoman, and that her mamma won't let her play with me," she wailed.

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They lingered to eat unripe wild grapes, trespassing daringly some six feet within the Heathway pasture, while a mild black bull turned his pink-white face doubtfully toward Kitty's red dress. When he sauntered nearer — possibly thinking a red poppy out of season would flavor his cud — they scrambled a retreat over the fence, tasting all the joy of a hairbreadth escape, and made friends with him through the cracks when he arrived, blow-

ing his fragrant breath at them, rolling the whites of his eyes terribly as he wrapped his great pink tongue around an apple that Rome offered, swallowing it with a single crunch, as one takes a homeopathic pill.

Kitty looked at him timidly under her bang. “Mamma says it’s bad luck to dream of cows,” she said, pensively. “When she dreams of cows she cries. She dreamed of cows last night.”

“What’s that man running for, I wonder?” said Rome. Up the road they saw the dust rising, and from it came not only one man, but two, three, four — a dozen! They came so fast that they were abreast of them and had passed before the children could shut their open mouths enough to ask a question. Among these running men they had seen the butcher, in his white apron with its red smears; John Premo, the tailor, his yellow tape measure streaming from his neck; Aby Frechette, his bare arms all flour, and various customers trailing on behind, — one man wearing a half-stitched coat, a boy carrying an unwrapped loaf of bread in one hand and the five cents to pay for it in the other. They were all going toward French Hollow. Then passed Constable Flaherty on horseback, his red face shining with excitement. When he saw the children, who had come out farther into the road, a troubled look crossed his face, and he started to rein up. But his lumbering horse was under a momentum not easy to arrest. He turned in the saddle and shouted to them.

“What did he say?” asked Kitty.

“He said, ‘Don’t go home!’” answered Rome, adding, “Come on!” And taking hold of hands, they ran toward Phosy’s house.

All the people were gathered about their own door, the constable’s horse standing with puffing nostrils in the flower bed, boys clinging to the window-sill and peering within, a group of women crying and gesticulating by themselves, and one man (to whom the others were listening) repeatedly making a strange gesture — drawing his finger across his throat.

In the doorway, seated on one of Phosy’s kitchen chairs and mopping his head with a bandanna, was Constable Flaherty, whom nobody but the sheriff and the undertaker might pass, — unless possibly a doctor or a priest, though there was no work there for either of them.

“I told yez to shtay away!” he said, angrily, as he saw the children. “Can’t somebody take thot little girl away? You’re a noice boy to bring her here!”

“What’s the matter?” asked Rome, stupidly. “Why can’t we go in?”

“Matther! O Lord!” groaned the constable. The women set up a shrill cackle of grief. The man had stopped his story and put his gesticulating hands into his pockets.

“Come here, Kitty,” said a quiet voice; “and you too, Roman Biznet.” Before the children, utterly uncomprehending as yet that something was very seriously wrong, knew what they were doing, each had hold of a lean, yellow hand and was

walking away, one on either side of Dr. Winthrop.

"I will tell you all about it presently," he would say when they questioned him, — "all in good time, in good time." Kitty became so reassured that she confided to him her marvelous experiences at school. But about Roman's heart a sick horror and conviction were creeping, for he saw tears rolling down the doctor's sallow cheeks.

Then he knew everything in a flash. Knew more than the doctor or the constable or the sheriff were ever to know, for they had not seen Antoine Biznet in the woods.

The doctor was taking them to his own house. As they went up the wide respectable street, children they knew at school, who had been forbidden to leave their yards since their parents had heard of the murder, looked over the fences at them, with awe-stricken respect.

Bess Heathway opened her gate halfway. "I'd like Kitty to stay with me," she said; "I'd like her for my little sister."

"I'll ask mamma," said Kitty, with a skip. Bess looked startled.

"We can talk of all that by-and-by, Bessie," said Dr. Winthrop, as they went on.

"I know," said Rome, gruffly, unheard by Kitty, who had found Susan on the doorstep washing her face, surrounded by a family of kittens, which for some reason she had chosen to raise in Dr. Winthrop's woodshed instead of at the Tracys', where she belonged.

“I know,” said Rome to the doctor; “I’ve guessed.”

“Then keep Kitty from guessing,” said the doctor.

“Somebody’s killed her. That’s it, ain’t it?”

“Yes.”

“Do they — do they know who?”

“Not yet.”

“Don’t they even give a guess?”

“No. You may be able to help them, if you answer truthfully everything you are asked when the time comes and say nothing to anybody until then. And — you must be a man, my son.”

The boy sat down in a chair by the window, staring out fixedly, his chin leaning on his palms. He was wishing he had had sense enough to get to Phosy before Antoine. The idea of doubting his father’s guilt entered his head no more than did the idea of betraying him.

Had he not seen his mother die? To be sure there had been no blood about that, and Phœbe was long in dying. Then he thought of Antoine’s playing on his violin, and something caught in his throat, something that shook his chest and blinded him. He so seldom cried that he hardly knew what it was, nor why Dr. Winthrop came and sat with his arm around him and finally, when the shaking and gasping would not cease, gave him a spoonful of something, at once sweet and bitter, after which he felt quite drowsy.

He heard Kitty ask some wondering, sympathetic question and the doctor say that Romy did

not feel quite well. Then the great bull with the pink nose looked at him out of a mist, and came near and sniffed at him, and he was afraid because he could not move away from its horns and hoofs. Then it was not the bull, but Antoine who leaned over him, asking him if he would like to hear the fiddle, but as he spoke, blood ran out of his mouth, and ran and ran until Rome felt it rising about him like water. He struggled awake.

Dr. Winthrop's quiet voice was saying: "Your mamma is sick, Kitty, and you are going to stay and be my little girl for a while."

The boy's ears seemed to have gained keenness with the drug. In the road he heard a man running and a voice from a distance calling: "Where goin'?"

"Heathway's bloodhound!" replied the man who ran. It was growing dark and clouds were shutting out the sunset.

Rome, in a vision, saw Pete Premo getting the beast, a creature so terrible that it was allowed to be hardly more than a tradition in the neighborhood and was seldom seen, — a fabled monster, with the skill of a devil, the wisdom of a man, the strength of an ox, whom nothing could escape.

Rome hardly knew what mental processes or physical exertion brought him, nor what time had elapsed in his getting there, but he stood by the fern clump at last. If his father had not left the neighborhood entirely, it seemed quite likely he would have returned to his lair. He whistled a bar of Antoine's music, and listened sharply.

Within the brake was a faint rustle, like a snake slipping on its coils.

"You are there, then," said the boy. A sigh answered him. "What did you do it for, anyway?"

"I don't know," mumbled a voice. "I asked her for something to eat and she would n't let me have it, so I started to help myself to a slice of bread, and she came after me, and I had the knife. Do they know it was me?"

"Mrs. Orleana saw you go away. They know what you look like, but don't guess who you are. They're after you now. They're looking in the other woods, though, but Pete Premo has gone for Judge Heathway's bloodhound. I'd just as soon they'd hang you, but I heard them telling how bloodhounds chewed people sometimes, so I thought I'd let you know."

"Much obliged, I'm sure," sneered the voice. "Why did n't you tell them where I was and save them the bother of going for the dog?"

He rose out of the brake.

"I did think of it, but I used to like to hear you play the fiddle, so I thought I'd give you a chance."

"How old are you?"

"Twelve."

"Ever steal anything?"

"N-no."

"Kill anything?"

"No."

"Real nice little boy, hey?"

"No. How can I be, with you for my father?"

“Who told you that?”

“Phosy. But I knew it anyway.”

“Yes. I used to think that when I was your age, and they told me about my father. See here, boy, go ahead and be famous, and be as good a man as you can. You’ve got it in you, I guess. I had n’t, someway” — He stopped and listened. Far in the distance came a long, deep bay.

“Run! run!” said the boy. The man jumped into the stream and waded up through its windings.

Rome, plunging blindly through the underbrush, never stopped running until he found himself in Dr. Winthrop’s kitchen. Mrs. Orleana was there, holding Kitty, who had fallen asleep with wet cheeks. Lizzie was squatting before the stove, and in a dim corner sat a trim black-robed figure, which he did not know at first, seeing it in that unaccustomed place. When he saw that it was Miss Tracy and that she held out a hand toward him, he went up to her, and standing by her side leaned his head against her breast. She passed her arm about him, and with one hand put his stiff hair back from his forehead. The friendly touch seemed to snap the steel wire that had held his nerves together, and he began to tremble. From trembling, he shook as if with ague.

“They’ve set the bloodhounds after him!” he shrieked, and fell upon the floor, crying hysterically.

Miss Tracy picked him up and held him in her lap. He had thought himself almost a man, but

presently falling asleep with his thumb in his mouth and his long lashes wet with tears, he seemed hardly so old as Kitty.

“My poor little genius!” said Miss Tracy, softly. “Doctor, I’m going to take him altogether. I—I believe the Lord means I should. I shall make him a gentleman and he shall be Billy’s brother.”

The doctor looked apprehensive.

“Do you realize all that would mean, Emily? I would n’t do such a thing on impulse,—besides”— He had been going to say that he had thought of taking the children himself, but he was a poor man and feeble. Emily Tracy, if she chose, could do much more for them.

“What about Kitty?” he asked.

“Oh—I suppose I’ll have to take her if I take the boy. I fancy she’s a good little thing. I can train her to be self-supporting at least. As a teacher, perhaps. Roman Biznet seems fond of her. They are as alike as brother and sister.”

“It would be a fine thing to do,” said the doctor, gravely. “But would you have the patience to carry it through? It would be sad if you should wish some day that you had left them as you found them—ignorant and—well, perhaps happier than knowledge and dependence may make them. I speak plainly.”

But Miss Tracy had only one argument, tearful and pious, “I believe the Lord means me to do it. Oh, doctor, my life has been so empty!”

The doctor, who had no one, looked puzzled.

He did not see how a woman with such a manly little fellow as Billy for a nephew and with a supposedly charming niece abroad, who could be brought home any day for the asking, could find life quite empty. He also knew something of the half-tamed, French-Indian temperament; that it might prove troublesome to so Anglo-Saxon and conventional a mind as that of Miss Emily Tracy. He glanced wistfully at Kitty, — such a tiny thing, as she lay nestled into pillows he had propped about her when Mrs. Orleana brought her in. She was still wearing the red dress that Alphonsine had made. The stiff, new ankle-ties had been removed. There was a hole in the little red stocking. Alphonsine would have been mending it that evening, probably.

The whole thing seemed unnecessary and terrible to the doctor. “Unnecessary” was a word he often used for cruel and heart-breaking things. In his vocabulary it was a kind of rebuke to the God that made things so.

“I’ll take them with me to-night, doctor.”

“To-night?”

He did not see why she need hurry so. He could at least have kept them over night; he should not have slept anyway, what with his liver — and they could have been quiet and comfortable on his wide bed, where he could watch their little dark faces and dream that the children of his imagination had at last taken on flesh and blood. He had once loved a woman as dark as they. That was before the war. Men who live alone

and who suffer physically must perforce dream many things, surround themselves with mirages of cheerfulness, if only to keep out the bloodthirsty phantoms of despair. He had peopled his little house with the ghosts of children who had never been born, with a shadowy wife who came and went silently, and sometimes kissed him as he slept. Her face never changed. The children's faces, until to-night, had been vague. But he was a poor man, and if Emily Tracy would do well by them —

He took up Kitty, tenderly. The boy waked enough to walk, and the four went over to the Tracy house.

After the door had shut between them and Dr. Winthrop, he was almost minded to open it again and demand Kitty at least. It did not seem right. Emily Tracy was so impulsive! What of the years to come, when her impulse should have worn out?

PART II

CHAPTER I

ROMAN BIZNET IS "GIVEN TO THE WORLD."

THE children grew up swiftly. Twelve-year-olds are more nearly men and women than one realizes. Doctor Winthrop received a call one day from a young woman with her skirts down to her ankles.

"Not Bessie Heathway! You were nursing a doll yesterday."

"Oh, dear, no! I haven't played with dolls for ever so long."

"Is it possible?"

And a day or two after, or a month or a year, a huge young fellow, with evidences upon his face of a recent razor, called to shake hands with the doctor and say good-by before he went to Yale.

"Bless me! Whatever has become of little Billy Tracy? Surely last week I helped you make a kite!" And the doctor became even more meditative than usual, and for some time after these surprises had hard work keeping his pipe alight.

But there was one child who stayed little for a long time, and did not grow too heavy to sit on his knee, was demure, quiet, and a little sad; that was Kitty Conto, who remained a child so long that people began to call her stunted. Then she

spindled up far enough to bring her eyes to a level with Billy's vest button second from the top, whereupon they lengthened her skirts, put up her heavy black braids, and sent her to the new Normal School to learn to be a teacher.

As for Roman Biznet, Miss Emily Tracy's plans concerning him had turned out much as she expected. He was a genius, and she "gave him to the world," whatever that may mean. Cosmos understood it to mean great philanthropy and greater resources on Miss Tracy's part; and many were the young aspirants during those years who managed to let Miss Tracy know, one way or another, that they, too, would like to be "given to the world." There was Gladys Wells, the minister's daughter, who thought the world would find a use for her voice if it were cultivated, and her brother, Benjamin Junior, who wanted to study medicine; and little Patience Bartlett, who wanted a bit of help to take her through college—but it did n't matter, for she died that year, instead. That was the year when Roman Biznet went abroad, and they said she had been very much in love with him. There was a romantic notion about, that she would have lived if it had n't been for Rome's going away and her disappointment about college coming together. Children grieve terribly over these things.

Miss Tracy kept Roman until he was nearly twenty, a slim, swarthy lad, of little physical strength, dreamy, lazy. He had not finished his work at the high school in the class with Elizabeth

Heathway, but one did not mind his stupidity in those matters when one considered his music. In that year when Bess entered Smith (Billy was then a Sophomore at Yale) Biznet was sent abroad.

Budding genius is not always ill-treated. The youngster climbing the ladder is not inevitably kicked in the face by the heel of him next above. If the genius is real, he is just as likely to fall in with some old Elijah who wants nothing so much as a worthy understudy for his mantle; and Herr Zukoffsky, the Herr Direktor, rejoiced over his new disciple.

Zukoffsky was a bit of an alienist, something of a biologist, an ethnologist, a philologist; these studies were merely his playthings, music being his serious business in life. There were strange conformations in Roman Biznet's face and skull. Zukoffsky took him to various laboratories, where he measured him, and questioned him until it dawned upon the boy that Herr Zukoffsky would have considered him better placed in the criminal class, and with this understanding Biznet set about coloring his past life vividly, giving much anxious thought to his confessions, that he might keep the golden mean between an utterly atrocious villain and a pretty good fellow. He generally let it go at mysterious temptations, to which he had not yielded; and that he might shine as a raconteur, spent much time and pains on the German language.

Somewhat to his alarm, on making this mental inventory, he found that there was quite enough

that was curious and needed no embellishment, to keep the professor happy, indefinitely. The Herr Direktor's questions, like a policeman's bull's-eye, showed him lurking figures of evil that he had not suspected.

"Your tendencies are thus and so," quoth the old gentleman, after various manipulations recalling Alphonsine's, and the Black Art.

And behold, it was so! And some might say that it was the old man's folly that put it all into the boy's head, — that Antoine the First, and the Second, though dormant in him, might have remained so, while his soul was steeped in music and his environment good. However, there is another argument, "Know thyself;" and if one is skillful about it, and the dog is sleepy enough, he may be chained while quiet, and then, if some shock wakes him up, the chains may hold while one escapes. It causes some worry to know he is there, to be sure, but may save trouble, ultimately.

But he felt no particular evil stirring in him at that time, nor indeed thoughts of any kind except such as he could readily write out on bars of five lines, or express upon his 'cello. The 'cello was the Herr Direktor's gift. It had belonged to a young Zukoffsky, long dead.

Toward the end of the third year he fell ill, at least he said he was ill, but it was not an illness easy of diagnosis. One of the most aggravating things about it was that his body was stronger than ever. His cheeks, which had been thin and sallow

all his life, began to have a flush of red blood in them like those of a white man, a freshening of his complexion, as of another race showing through the red. His eyes were bright and clear; he could outwalk, outfence any man of his size.

But his good nature was gone. Between his eyebrows there came a fine, hard line. Men who stood opposite him with a foil were nervous about the button on his tip. He lost his popularity.

He had plodded along in a business-like way at his studies, absorbed and cheerful; now, suddenly a Mænad was at his shoulder, threatening vague disaster. Not petty, every-day disaster, like death or disgrace, but something that rumbled subterranously, got into his ear-drums, quaked in his Adam's apple. He rushed at music in a panic, like a cat taking to a tree. Then it was that the Conservatory stood by in wonder and Fame blew upon her trumpet.

But he did not care, for he was homesick, and thought much about a little yellow man in Cosmos who kept good bitter medicines, which he administered with wholesome acrid advice, doing good to soul and body. The German doctors said there was nothing the matter with him, while looking at him sidelong, and Zukoffsky put up his delicate soul-measuring instruments, fearing the red disks in Biznet's eyes, and the hard line between his eyebrows, like the cut of a sharp tool.

"Ach, mein Sohn," he said sadly, "for such as thou art, God should have existed."

"Don't you mean the Devil?"

“The Devil? I have never doubted him at any time.”

Biznet had a room-mate, a weak-eyed young artist who would have been a cartoonist if he had possessed a sense of humor; and this man he so seriously annoyed, being sleepy by day, wakeful at night, unreasonable at all times, that a duel nearly came to pass. This would have pleased Biznet immensely, but somehow the challenge never came.

He would edge Baumgarten and his dreary jokes away from the only window and plant himself there with his 'cello, not needing the light for that or for anything else, while Baumgarten, like a cat chased into a corner by a broom, sat in helpless indignation within a cloud of smoke, looking out with round face, his round eyes exaggerated by near-sighted glasses, while Biznet sawed away with such unspeakable discord of false notes with rough edges as could only be accomplished by perfect technique and knowledge of harmony. There was also a medical student, named Bauer, who was very young and proportionately wise, loving to practice surreptitiously.

One day, — Biznet announcing with a carefully selected stock of German oaths that he was sick, for sleep had forsaken him, and that he should probably murder Baumgarten presently, because he was out of catgut, and did n't feel able to go out to buy any, and Baumgarten looked so much like a cat anyway that it would n't make any particular difference, — Bauer felt his pulse, noticed a

nervous pulsation at his mouth corner, and shook his head ponderously, then produced a little needle with which he pierced his arm, pumping therein a night's sleep.

"That's the stuff!" mumbled Biznet, while his nerves untangled like a skein of yarn. He grinned sleepily at Baumgarten. "Go to work, old chap, you can have the window."

The medical student's cap twisted spirally to the ceiling, his attenuated neck following like a swaying bell cord. The room blurred, little zig-zag golden lights twinkling in its gray obscurity. Vague voices in his ear-drums debated earnestly, but as he listened eagerly for the outcome the sound dwindled and receded.

It was still his own bed, he knew, and the same room. His eyes were half open and focused on the door of the white tile stove, but he could not move the pupils by a hair's breadth to increase his arc of vision. Within him was a struggle as of two concentric bodies disputing for their common centre,—as if one of the involved spheres of a Chinese puzzle should begin to grow, and this contest finally caused some microscopic fissure in the inert outer shell, through which he emerged like steam, looked back, and saw the shell still lying on the bed, one arm under its head, the other thrown wide across the plump blue feather-bed. The eyes were half open under their heavy lids and looked dull and glassy. The room was full of moonlight and the night lamp flickered dingily. Baumgarten snored.

Yet the room was not altogether as it should be. There were present those things that children fear in the dark, and he knew himself to be in that obscure border world of murky substance which has no landmark or guide. The room, Baumgarten, and the Roman Biznet on the bed had little significance, but there were other creatures about, though they eluded his sight. Every time he turned his head something stepped out of the range of vision. He spun about in anger, trying to be too quick for this evasion. It spun after, faster, faster — until both of them in a spiral eddy swept out through the shut window and twirled away over the city, dizzily, for a year.

He sat down at last beneath Alphonsine's old kitchen table. It was crowded and cramped there, for he was of man's size, though Kitty, in a red dress, trotting about, was the Kitty who had belonged in that kitchen at that time, with eyes just on a level with the table-top. He held his breath and drew back to escape contact with Phosy's feet and skirt. It seemed some terrible calamity would befall if she found him, yet she was in a good humor, singing French songs with nasal cheerfulness.

He held up a warning finger to keep Kitty quiet. She put her thumb in her mouth, frowning. Something scratched at the door, and whined. He remembered swiftly that this was the Heathway bloodhound, old Cerberus, from whom he had been running away for many years. He signaled frantically to Kitty to keep her mother from opening the door, but she stood sulkily sucking her thumb.

Phosy lifted the latch. Pat — pat — pat! he could see the four great feet approaching. Phosy slowly raised a corner of the tablecloth. She and the dog looked in upon him, cheek by cheek. But it was not Phosy's face. It was the Gorgon Medusa. He woke with a yell.

"Thunderweather! You must have a bad conscience," grumbled Baumgarten. But before Biznet could retort, Baumgarten changed to Bess Heathway in her graduating gown; Bess Heathway, with uplifted, monitory finger, who lectured him severely about many things, until he groaned with weariness, and turned aside to dig, dig, dig in the leafy black soil of the Adirondack woods. He was working with the bow of his 'cello, and as he dug, the soil crumbled and heaved as if over a mole's burrow. The bloodhound was with him again, but this time as a friend, helping to paw away the earth — dig, dig, dig.

"She has gone deeper," said the dog.

"Who has?"

"Kitty."

Dig, dig, dig!

"Here she is," said the dog cheerfully. They came upon a child's hand deep down in the soil. Rome grasped it. It was warm and living. The fingers closed about his own.

"Got her?" said the dog. "Pull away!"

And when he had pulled, it was not Kitty that came up, but Bess Heathway, quite indignant, brushing the soil from her long, light hair.

Then came a strange voice singing a strange

melody, yet as he listened he knew both voice and tune. He fled and the song pursued. He could not have told whether it was for minutes or hours, but gravitation let go of him, and he flitted lightly, like a bat, through obscure places. This air, with an elaborate accompaniment, stayed in Roman Biznet's ears when he awoke finally to reason in the early dawn.

He glanced with blurred vision toward Baumgarten, his bristle of flaxen hair poked out at one end of the pudgy blue gingham feather-bed, but that solid Teuton seemed rather less real than the flimsy and vanished nightmare. Opening the door of the white tile stove he put on coal with a crash.

"Ach, Donnerwetter," moaned poor Baumgarten, "he is awake again!"

"Shut up and go to sleep. Ass!"

He hauled out a pack of music paper and worked until the sky beyond the Dom had run its gamut of watery gray, mottled pink and yellow, and broad sun-shot blue, glancing up now and then as he wrote. The music that he was writing was thin, evil, of the darkness; in some way that he did not understand, the sunrise touched it with little golden lights and lines of fire, giving it beauty as it gave beauty to other mournful exhalations of the night. Other themes came singing in his ears, something fine, high and shrill beyond what a violin can do, something deeper than a bass viol's compass. He thought of the stones that sang at the rising of the sun; it seemed that the great Dom was not entirely silent.

Baumgarten got up and made coffee, putting some at Biznet's elbow as a peace offering. Bauer, with professional solemnity, had said that Biznet must have coffee on awakening. Baumgarten's coffee was always good. It was the only thing about him that Biznet never found fault with.

He had finished when Herr Zukoffsky came. The old man had learned that he was ill and came trembling. Death and young genius were nearly associated in his mind, for he had lived long and knew the ways of the gods in these matters; but when he saw Biznet well and working, his anxiety turned to petulance, for he was asthmatic and had walked rapidly. He took up the manuscript in a scathing mood. After he had read a bar or two, he looked bewildered.

“Your work, this?”

“I dreamed it last night.”

The professor's brow cleared. He did not like plagiarism.

“Ach so! A freak of memory, then, and remarkable. You heard it and forgot. I went to school with the man who wrote it. Von Kettner it was. But that he killed a man and left the country secretly — there was none like him — none. But he was bad. Of his work only this and a little more is left. You rarely hear it now, and only here. It was never published. This is the Brocken fragment, and the song of the Red Mouse. He planned to do a Faust. Gounod was n't — is n't — wie heisst es? — is n't in it with him.”

He beamed proudly at his little exhibition of

Yankee slang. Philology was one of his weaknesses.

"I swear I never heard it," said Roman bewildered, then stopped short.

What was that about his grandfather's name having begun with a Von, before he rechristened himself Biznet?

Something inside him heaved and quivered, like a startled compass needle when a piece of iron sits down beside it. He knew as well as he knew the scale of C that he had never heard any "Red Mouse" song, nor that thin sneering tenor voice of subtly wicked timbre, before it came into his opium dream, but he acquiesced blankly when Zukoffsky declared it a freak of memory.

Freak of memory! It was his grandfather himself, long crumbled to dust among Adirondack sand and boulders, who now took substance within his brain.

Biznet nervously poured a glass of brandy, drinking it without remonstrance from Zukoffsky, who was looking into the past with a little reminiscent devil leering from his bleary eyelids.

"Ach, lieber! But he was bad!" he murmured relishingly.

"You bet your life he was bad," said Biznet tensely, thinking of when Powasket's long-suffering daughter chopped his head open, wastefully strewing that musical brain in the dust and cinders.

"I bet my life he was bad," assented Zukoffsky, cheerily.

"Of course, as you say, I must have heard it

and forgotten. A man's brain is an odd thing, is n't it? ‘Genug, die Maus war doch nicht grau.’” His voice was harsh, and impossible in singing. Its few notes were tenor.

Zukoffsky looked up with a puzzled expression. “I wonder why your voice should remind me of Franz Von Kettner's? A trick of my own brain probably. The imagination of the ear is as great as the imagination of the eye!”

Whereat Biznet sat down on the floor and laughed long and shrilly. “‘Ein rothes Mäuschen.’ Oh, the brain is queer all right! ‘Ihr aus dem Munde!’ Don't you want to measure me some more? There are lots of queer things in my head that you have n't got at yet.”

But the Herr Direktor, whose dignity was a sensitive-plant, stumped downstairs fuming. Biznet, left alone, threw up his arms with a dramatic, despairing gesture.

“And I wanted to be good!” he said, plaintively. He locked the door and cried himself to sleep, like an hysterical girl, sleeping well into the afternoon, his long lashes stiff with dried tears.

Perhaps in some way Bauer with his well-intentioned hypodermic had done a mischief. It is not well to experiment upon the brains of geniuses, say those who know; they bear too strong a likeness to other brains good for nothing but to be shut away where they may not trouble those of us who are sane and quiet, living within our three dimensions methodically.

Bauer's illicit tampering may have sprung from

its hinges the door of a Bluebeard's chamber, causing a lesion of some infinitesimally small, thin membrane, through which thereafter inhabitants of a not understood region might have access. When the mediæval vampire had once filtered vapourously under the crack of a door, could he not afterward go and come at ease by the same entrance? There are as many curious phenomena about now as when men used to talk of ghosts and devils, fearful, but not puzzled, concerning them. Now we are wise enough to be very much puzzled, indeed, — are as bewildered inventing a nomenclature and making a catalogue, as Adam was when he considered his lions, lambs, and dinosaurs.

So the shut door, once opened, afterward showed a tendency to spring ajar from time to time, when nerves were overwrought and the bodily tension was wrong throughout; and he grew familiar with that region where something is wrong with Time, which may reel off a thousand years while the clock strikes one, and with Space, for one may be chased swiftly to the moon and back, yet still keep his hand on the anchor-rope that holds him to his body.

And in all these dreams there was a Jekyll-Hyde polarization of two men, distinct, though folded up in each other like spheres united by that incomprehensible Fourth Dimension which mathematicians find amusing. These things bothered him, and yet interested him like a new toy during his last year at the Conservatory, and out of his abnormal sensations he sometimes evolved musical ideas, thus turning them to account.

It was in February that one Isaac Liebermann visited the Conservatory and made his acquaintance. Liebermann was a man who dealt in genius, and understood the science of introducing it to a fastidious and moneyed public. But Herr Zukoffsky grew rather sober when he learned that Biznet had signed a contract which made him the conductor of a new orchestra under Mr. Liebermann's management. He said nothing discouraging, to be sure, confining his observations to the single monosyllable, "Ach!"

It seemed odd to be planning his return. But for the quarterly arrival of money from Miss Tracy, Cosmos had become an immaterial place, so distant as to be practically non-existent, like Mars. He sometimes wondered if he could ever repay Miss Tracy, and if she really expected him to do so; but he spent all the money she sent, and said little about the fact that he made a third more from his pupils. He could have lived entirely by his own efforts had he chosen; but it takes a rather stronger moral sense than he possessed to say, "Get thee behind me!" to unearned increment.

Kitty had not been a good correspondent, and her letters had been prim little notes inclosed in Miss Tracy's; but one day there came a plethoric envelope in Kitty's handwriting. He tried to imagine, as he slit the envelope, how she probably looked, these days, in long dresses and with her hair put up. "Pretty, I'll bet. Wonder if she and Billy will make a match of it? Only she's a damn sight too good for him. Hello!" —

An unmounted print fell out of the envelope. She was pretty, but thin, and her hair top-heavy in contrast to her childish chin. And how big her eyes were! She held her head with its characteristic droop, and looked up as of old under her lashes. The neck of her gown was low, and evidently the photographer had touched out hollows and cords at the throat.

DEAR ROMY,—This letter is just from me to you. Miss Tracy always wants me to show her what I write; but I'm not going to this time. I've been thinking a long time about what I ought to do. Dr. Winthrop is the only one I can talk to much, and I don't like to worry him. He seems to blame himself for letting Miss Tracy have me. I don't see why, I'm sure. She has always been very kind.

I think maybe I'm not very well, and that is why I'm so stupid. I am going to the Normal School, you know. They thought I could learn to teach and be independent, and I was glad to think I might be able to pay Miss Tracy some time. Of course in your case, as she says, you're a genius, and spending money on your education is like endowing a college, or something like that,—it's giving something to the world. But with me,—of course she does n't say this, but I understand,—I'm only a little French girl from the Hollow; and I would have worked in the factory or gone out to service if it had n't been for her kindness. I used to hope that she would grow

fond of me; but there is something — I suppose my stupidity.

But some way I don't get on in the Normal. I was all right until it came to Methods. In Methods, you know, you have to plan exactly what the teacher must ask to get the right answer from the child without directly suggesting the answers.

I've been flunked twice in Primary Methods and once in Language Methods. Geography Methods is the only one I wasn't flunked in. And next semester comes Arithmetic Methods, and then I shall certainly die!

Miss Tracy says I don't study. But oh, Romy, if you knew how hard I've tried — [The Spencerian chirography was uneven here, and a blot had been carefully erased.]

I know perfectly well that I never can get through; and if I did, I could n't teach. Children don't mind me; they just won't do it. And the Model teachers get so cross! — as if I would n't do better if I could.

And Billy tries to help me when he comes home, but they don't like to have him. And he does n't help much, anyway, — just sits around and makes fun of the Methods, and tells me I don't want to teach. Well, I don't. But what then? Billy is part of my puzzle, Romy, — I can't say more than that. I wonder what makes men act so, anyway?

And I've been thinking of everything I could do instead of teaching, and there does n't seem to be anything but housework. I'm good at that; I'm better at that than Bess Heathway is, — *I can*

keep mended up, and she can't; and I put up six dozen glasses of currant jelly last fall. I make all my own clothes, too. But try as I may to economize and not be a burden — oh, well, I don't mean to complain about it; and it's nobody's fault but mine, because I'm stupid.

But what I was wondering was this: If you come home next spring, and then if you live in New York the next winter, why could n't I keep house for you? I could make it cost less, I'm sure, than just your board would be. It's just the same as if we were really brother and sister, and you're all I've got. I don't want to be a bother to anybody, and this is the only way I can think of to be really useful.

Billy has two new dogs; they are only half grown. Adlor says they are n't the right sort for Adirondack hunting. Did you know that Adlor is our coachman now? And Billy says they're all right to take when you go fishing. Of course he's joking when he says that. Bess Heathway has done her four college years in three, — which is considered wonderful. What would n't I give for about a teaspoonful of her brains!

Miss Maud Tracy is with us all the time now. We are all well; and if they knew I was writing, they would send their love.

Your affectionate sister,

KITTY.

Roman Biznet, having read, found a place among the steins for Kitty's picture. The finding a place consisted largely in the ejection of other photo-

graphs, tightly corseted women, more or less lightly clad.

"Who's that?" asked Baumgarten, when he had rescued the discarded ladies from the coal scuttle.

"The girl I'm going to marry," said Biznet grimly.

"Oh! Looks so much like you I thought it must be your sister."

"You think too much!"

His letter to Kitty was as follows, and his intentions were really too good to be used as paving-stones for the road to a certain place. Biznet meant as well as though his skull were formed on moral lines. He addressed the letter to Bess Heathway outside.

DEAR PUSSY, — Don't you care! I'm coming home the last of May, noble and famous, to paint Cosmos red, and kill all the Normal School teachers that flunked you, and the children that would n't mind. Tell them that. Tell them that no one can be mean to a Big Injun's squaw and live.

Romy is It! There's a chap from New York, by the name of Liebermann, has been snooping around here for a brand new conductor for a brand new orchestra to make a brand new popular hit. You will see me make that hit next winter, and there'll be money to burn.

I would n't say anything to anybody else about your housekeeping idea. It is a good one, but

needs a few amendments which I think I can supply when we come to talk it over. So keep your hair on. What a lot of it you've got, by the way! And wait for Romy to fish you out of the soup.

You will please excuse the slang. There's an old fellow here by the name of Zukoffsky who fairly lives on it. He calls it Philology. Sometimes I have to make up things to please him. If you know any new slang I wish you would send me some. I know mine is out of date.

Affectionately,

ROMAN BIZNET.

To Bess he wrote : —

MY DEAR MISS HEATHWAY, — Is it trespassing too much on your good nature to ask you to give the inclosed letter to my cousin? I understand she is expected to show my letters to the family, and this one concerns a matter which interests her alone.

I hear you have finished your college course in three years! Will you accept my heartiest congratulations, also envy? But it makes me feel rather scared when I think of meeting so much intellect again, as I shall have the pleasure of doing in about a month.

Most sincerely yours,

ROMAN BIZNET.

Then he put the letters in his pocket, where they remained. He left the coat behind him when he sailed, and the conscientious Baumgarten mailed them on the next steamer—a month after they were written.

CHAPTER II

BEHIND THE WISTARIA VINE

COSMOS schools close on the last day of June. During that month good little girls are sentimental about parting from their teachers for ten weeks, conceiving that those persons of curious tastes must miss them greatly during the summer, and yearn for the reopening of school. What else can one think after watching their behavior through the year, their enthusiastic punctuality, their animated manner of imparting uninteresting facts, the various tricks they resort to in order to persuade children to learn a thing? One does what one likes when one grows up. Teachers must like teaching as well as little girls like playing with dolls, and it seems reasonable, too — standing up in front of a class and waving a pointer about and selecting little boys to erase the blackboard, and having things your own way generally. When Gladys Wells and Bessie Heathway and Roman Biznet used to attend school, teachers even smacked naughty children on the fingers. But the new Normal School, where their little brothers and sisters went, had changed all that, pupils and pupil-teachers being on an equality wherein the pupil-teachers were only kept from becoming inferiors by the protection afforded them by heads of

departments. Nobody was ever smacked now, and yet — it seemed a dull, modern way of doing things ; there must have been romance in the danger of a licking, and where was the use of wicked daring, bringing frogs and beetles to school in your pockets, throwing spots of sunlight about with little mirrors, pulling the girls' hair, if one could get nothing but a talking-to from a head of department, which was apt to make one cry and feel silly. But that was the masculine view point, — boys not having any particular sympathy for teachers.

Tudy Wells gave the impression that her older sister Gladys had dwindled, taken to wearing her hair in braids, and blossomed out in very short pink petticoats. Tudy's intimate friend at school was Molly Santwire, sister to that Adlor Santwire who had once seen a loup-garou, and who was now become the Tracy coachman ; but this friendship had to be indulged in secretly, Molly being a French Catholic young one, while Tudy was the daughter of the Presbyterian minister. In the "School of Practice" Miss Kitty Conto was their music-teacher — poor Kitty ! who never could sound with her voice quite the same note as that struck by the tuning fork, and got into much trouble thereby from the criticisms of her classmates, whose business it was to sit in the back of the room and "observe" her failings, take notes thereon, and make out as bad a case as they could to the Model teacher, who frequently came in, looking bored, and took the class away from her,

but who somehow understood Kitty, music, and human limitations generally so that on the Day of Judgment Kitty was marked just high enough to pass, though it made little difference in the end, and Kitty did not care.

Tudy and Molly could take the pitch from the tuning fork very well, however, and always did so with all the strength of their raucous little voices, being fond of Miss Conto in a motherly way, and anxious to help her out. There was a little song she was trying to teach them. They were to sing it on the great last day, and these benevolent two would get together in odd corners and practice, determined that it should not be their fault if the programme faltered in that part for which Miss Conto was responsible. The song consisted chiefly of a heavy, sing-song refrain, "We know not why!" It rhymed variously with butterfly, sky, high, and die, there being four stanzas, and implied that the writer of it found something to puzzle him in all that these words suggest. From frequent repetition Tudy and Molly also became aware of some lurking puzzle in the universe, and practiced with a wealth of expression which convulsed Dr. Winthrop as the sounds came out of some hollow place in the hedge, but rendered Miss Maud Tracy, whose ear was sensitive, extremely nervous.

"We know not why,
We know not why, not why" —

"I believe I'll stop them," said Maud between a frown and a smile.

“ But soon you ’ll die,
Poor butterfly ! ”

“ We know not why,” hummed Miss Tracy. “ The worst of those wretched little tunes is that they get into one’s head so, and buzz there like a fly behind a pane of glass. But don’t stop them, they are practicing for Kitty, I believe, and I suppose the better they can do, the better it will be for her.” She spoke with some impatience, and sighed.

“ We know not why,” sang the harsh little voices in the hedge, as tuneless as locusts. But to Dr. Winthrop, who sat in his garden chair on the other side of the hedge, smoked, and felt that he was a spectator only of the droning green summer, the passing people, and the passing clouds, there seemed a certain appropriateness in this little insect tune from the hedge, as if it voiced the ignorance of a young and puzzled planetful of creatures better than the same sentiment lamented over by a skilled orchestra, or a mighty-lunged and tender-throated singer.

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There are some hearts so curiously constructed as to have but a single compartment, with room for but a single idol. If a newer and prettier idol appears, the old must come down forthwith. Some little girls, if offered a new wax doll in exchange for the grimy remnant from a previous Christmas, will keep the grimy remnant ; others will throw it aside for fresh paint, curled hair, a body stiff with sawdust. Every one knows, too, how cats lose all interest in their kittens, when kittens no longer.

New kittens, new dolls, and sometimes new human beings, are certainly desirable.

The Lord had finally thought best to bring home Miss Maud Tracy from abroad, and settle her at her aunt's. The Lord had also softened Miss Emily Tracy's heart toward her niece. Neither of them understood how they could have done without each other all these years. They vied in finding pet names for each other, and talked everlasting "baby talk," a vice to which many good and otherwise intelligent people are prone. Miss Maud Tracy, tall, dignified, with features generally described as "classic," became "P'essus" in her aunt's vocabulary, and Miss Emily Tracy was "Dearie" or its equivalent in other languages when Miss Maud wished to indicate that she had been abroad, and talked several languages.

In the years that had passed since Alphonsine's murder, a wistaria vine had grown from inconspicuous childhood to spreading maturity, covering one end of the Tracy veranda and making it a bower whence one could watch the street and the neighboring grounds, one's self unseen.

It was a restful place, much loved by Miss Emily Tracy and her niece, who here embroidered, mended, talked, or read Browning together the summer through. It was the middle of June. Roman Biznet was expected soon, though he was to stay for a while at Long Branch with his manager, Liebermann. Miss Tracy had been rather disturbed that morning at hearing from Mrs. Heathway, who had it from Mrs. Wells, who had learned

it from her son Benny, whose classmate, a "theolog," had visited Roman Biznet on his journey to the Holy Land, that the deceiving genius had been making money enough from pupils for the past two years to have supported himself easily, had he chosen, without using the money Miss Tracy sent him.

"Well, Dearie," said Maud, yawning classically behind her large white hand, "is n't there a saying in this part of the world that all honest Frenchmen have wool in the palms of their hands? You did n't expect him to grow any wool while he was abroad, did you?"

"Look at these stockings," was Miss Tracy's unanswerable argument. "They are darned until you can't see the original fibre — in some places — and I have done it all willingly, gladly, for the sake of that boy. I have been giving him to the world, as one gives a church or a school." She had said this so many times that it was as threadbare as the stocking she held up.

"Well," said Maud, "you have your reward. He will be famous. One cannot expect everything, even honesty, from genius."

"No," answered Miss Tracy, "but I am *done*." She bit off a thread of black floss with a finality there was no gainsaying. "I have made my sacrifice. And in those first years I sacrificed you, P'essus, without realizing it. But you have forgiven me, and now you and I are going to be happy together."

"I've been wanting to speak to you about Kitty," said Maud.

“Kitty means well,” said Miss Tracy.

“Y-yes. Do you feel that you quite understand her?”

“I don’t know. Just how do you mean?”

“I daresay I’m mistaken, but I had an idea the other day. It would be awkward” —

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I don’t want to be unkind to the child, or unjust — and I did n’t want to worry you” —

“Don’t keep me in suspense!”

“Kitty may have no intention whatever of becoming a teacher. That may be why she takes so little interest in her studies.”

“But” —

“My small brother is, unfortunately, fond of pretty faces and little appealing women. He is also, to use his own frightful slang, ‘well-heeled.’”

“But he’s been away. They have n’t seen each other except at vacation time.”

“But he is back, now, graduated, and I heard him saying something yesterday about ‘settling down.’ He said it to her.”

“What did she say?”

“That it would be nice, and that New York must be a nice place to live in.”

“And then?”

“And then I turned the corner, and remarked that it was a pleasant afternoon. Billy’s face was as red as this embroidery silk, and hers was as white as this!”

“Oh!”

“It *would* be something of a *mésalliance*, don’t you think?”

“Impossible! What have I done!”

“Don’t worry, though, *Chérie*; as you say, I have some influence over Billy. We won’t let him make any mistakes, will we? Here they come! What did I tell you? Look at the angle at which he holds her parasol, and those books of hers under his arm. They may be ‘brother and sister,’ but *I’m* his sister, and he never takes that attitude when he walks with *me*.”

“Oh, dear me!”

“If they only knew how silly they look together! He’s twice too big for such a midget as that.”

The two came up the hill slowly. It might have been because Kitty was languid and ill. Maud insisted that it was the lovers’ stroll. Kitty’s eyes were fixed upon the green screen of wistaria behind which the two women sat. Billy was as handsome as young men grow when their bodies become religion to them. His face had been sweet and honest when he was a little boy. One could say little more for it now, except that it held possibilities, when the boy should have become more of a man. A little trouble and disappointment would do wonders in that direction.

“Hello!” he said, closing the red sunshade as they mounted the steps. “You hide away in there as snug as a couple of bugs in a rug.”

“Some people might choose more elegant similes,” said Maud. Kitty went upstairs with her books.

“Or spiders. The modern Arachne, or Clotho,

maybe," — he took up a bunch of his sister's floss, — "who does n't spin, nor toil, particularly, but embroiders, and weaves, and designs destinies in purple and pink. Is that for me? I'd rather have a blue silk cushion with a white Y. I lost that one you gave me. — Oh, I forgot — letter from Bizzy."

"What an odd handwriting," said Maud, taking it to pass to Miss Tracy.

"It's just like him, though," said Billy. "Kind of joggly and sprawly — slants over too far, and all the letters have too long tails, and the tails can't make up their minds to any particular slant."

"Do you pretend to read character from writing?"

"Oh, no. I don't know."

"It is as good as yours."

"Here's the handwriting for you!" said Billy, with sudden enthusiasm, and pulled out a normal school exercise paper of Latin sentences, in a painful Spencerian hand, with much careful punctuation, and many errors.

"I'm going to coach her," he explained. "Holy Moses! what work she makes of it!" But his tone suggested affectionate admiration for the mistakes.

Miss Tracy and her niece exchanged glances while Billy lit a pipe and went around to the garden, taking a Latin grammar with which to freshen his own memory.

"He's going to coach her!" said Maud. — "And what does Roman Biznet say?"

“He will be here next week. — There comes Bessie. How untidy she is! If it were n’t for that, I should say that Billy might do worse than to — How do you do, dear? Kitty is upstairs, I think. Wait a minute, until I take a few stitches in your skirt-binding. You might trip and be badly hurt.”

“I’m frightfully careless, I know. I hear Rome is coming back soon. I don’t know what the town will do with such a celebrity.”

Elizabeth had grown to a generous figure which might become heavy at middle age. She wore her clothes with something of the careless nonchalance with which a statue wears drapery. The effect was considered sloppy, but Elizabeth was rather pretty, and had gained all sorts of honors at college. Her forehead might be top-heavy, and there was a little crease between her eyebrows, but one liked to look at her eyes. They were difficult eyes to meet, however, looking at one rather too squarely and steadily for comfort.

“Well, Kitty, here’s your letter,” said Bess in a tone of strong disapproval. “Of course I do as I am asked, but I don’t see why you need be so underhanded about a letter from Rome.”

Kitty took the letter, looking subdued and unhappy. “I did n’t think you’d mind,” she said. “There were some things I wanted to ask him about that they’d have thought queer.”

“But you would n’t have to show them his letters!” said Bess. She was a young woman so singularly her own mistress in every matter that she could not understand a different state of affairs.

“They’d think it queer, if I did n’t,” said Kitty. “There is n’t anything wrong about it. I was only so worried about my Normal work, and I wrote to ask him what I should do if I failed. This has been examination day, and I know I did n’t get through. I’ve failed once already, you know, and there’s still another year. I can’t get to be a Senior, somehow. You’re so bright I suppose you think I’m just lazy. May I read my letter? Why! It was written a month ago — and I’ve wanted it so!”

Her eyes were brighter when she had finished it, and she hummed a tuneless little song as she carefully put it back in its envelope and looked meditatively about as if for a place of concealment.

“Why, you foxy little thing!” exclaimed Bess disgustedly. “I hate deceit. They would n’t prowl around and read your private letters.”

“Wait till you’re adopted,” said Kitty, still humming happily. “I have to be very careful not to be misunderstood. I said the other day when Miss Maud was playing the piano that I wished I knew how, and they thought I was complaining because I had n’t been taught music, and hinting that I wanted lessons.”

“Nonsense, you are too sensitive.”

“Am I? Maybe. But I know they’re tired of me. And they think I’m bad. I don’t know just how. But they watch me out of the sides of their eyes. Miss Tracy used to like me well enough before Miss Maud came.”

“Billy likes you well enough,” said Elizabeth meaningly.

“Oh! Billy. He does n't count,” said Kitty with a cheerless laugh. She had finally pinned Rome's letter securely inside her dress and sat down by the window frowning abstractedly at the garden. “There's Billy studying my Latin grammar,” she laughed; “he thinks he's going to coach me this summer so that I can get through next year.”

Bess picked up a photograph from Kitty's dressing-table. It was a very German picture of Rome with his 'cello. “It seems odd to think of Rome as grown up,” she said. “I wonder if he and I will fight as fiercely as we did in the high school.”

“I remember,” smiled Kitty; “sometimes for about ten minutes you'd perfectly love each other and he'd send me away because I was too little to play your games. But I'd sit down and wait till you slapped his face, and he would come back to me, his eyes all red inside the black, and swearing French that you could n't understand. Remember the time he and Billy and you and I all played tag, while a thunderstorm was coming up?”

“I don't know,” said Bess doubtfully. Then she blushed. “Oh, you mean” —

“That time he kissed you — yes. How mad you were! He wore court-plaster on his cheek for a week, and I put witch-hazel on his head where the hair came out.”

“How dreadful! I don't believe it.”

“Oh, but I did. I wonder how you and he will get along now. I shall enjoy watching.”

CHAPTER III

A CROP OF DANDELIONS

IT was a cool sweet morning, well washed by a rainy night. The train that brought Biznet came into it dusty and unclean with the savor of a hot yesterday in New York about it, and took its noisy drink, in the middle of the far-reaching silence of that region, in which human beings, birds, insects, church bells make but little stir at any time. St. Mary's Church was tinkling for early mass like a bell-wether, and Sunday lay upon the land.

Roman Biznet, the only passenger for Cosmos, looked about him with delight as he stood by his luggage on the deserted platform. Down the yellow winding road he could see the Tracy carriage approaching at a rapid trot. They had counted on the train being late as usual, whereas it was, for once, on time.

Feeling that he was watched, he turned to meet the very bright eyes of a small French boy, who carried a formidable whip, and evidently belonged to a cow at that moment strolling across the track. — "Hello, Bub, what's your name?" doubting somewhat whether this might not be his former Self thus greeting him at the town's threshold, not altogether approving him. His former Self had once worn just such flapping and torn straw

hats, had been barelegged and colored by the soil, but with a rather clean little soul inside. He blinked uneasily under the child's stare. If the youngster had claimed the name "Roman Biznet," Rome felt that he would have yielded the point courteously and returned upon the next train, a new King Robert of Sicily.

"Napoleon Orleans. W'at 's yours?"

"Me, I'm Roman Biznet," he replied with the twang of his youth, and gave the child a left-over fifty pfennig piece.

He had not thought to be so glad to see Cosmos again, and wondered if it might not have been simple nostalgia that had ailed him abroad.

"Hello, Adlor!" That model servant put a finger to his forehead in most approved fashion, but there was a wide grin of equality upon his face.

"Seen any lous-garoux lately?" asked Rome, when the boxes, with their many foreign labels, had been piled behind and they were under way to the Tracy house. Adlor's blue flannel shoulders shrugged in uncoachman-like style, and he wagged one ear, an accomplishment for which he had been famous in the days that were gone.

"Not till now," he answered quietly.

Billy met the carriage halfway on his bicycle and acted as outrider. Miss Tracy stood upon the veranda with outstretched hands and a somewhat pathetic smile, — there were tears in her eyes and she did not speak, but looked at him very earnestly and questioningly. He had grown

handsome, she thought — this strange toy of hers. Now he was a toy no longer; other and more skillful hands had had the making of him. He kissed her hand in a foreign way, and then her withered cheek. Some dormant youthful instinct brought bright young color to her face and made her draw back shyly.

“You have improved,” she said rather stiffly, and introduced him to Maud, who just then emerged from the shadows of the hall.

Her greeting was cordial and easy, and he smiled at her, serenely, but there was an ill-tempered line between his eyebrows, and his hand was lax as it touched hers.

“And Kitty?” he asked.

She was coming down the stairs, with light, slow step, for it was ill-bred to be in haste, to put one’s self forward in any matter whatever. But brushing rudely past the others, he met her half-way up the stairs, and she hid her face in his neck and cried quietly, whispering under her breath: “I thought you would never come. I — I failed at the Normal — I knew I should — you must take me away — I — I” —

“Why, Kitty! The child is nervous,” said Miss Tracy in an annoyed tone. Rome, turning slightly toward the group below, noticed Billy’s face, as black as a thundercloud, and Maud smiling queerly. It seemed to him that she was watching everybody, like something hidden among jungle grasses and peering out, itself unperceived. It occurred to him that she was rather worth watching

herself. Their eyes met for an instant. She raised her eyebrows ever so slightly and strolled back to the veranda.

But Kitty grew suddenly gay after a moment's gusty weeping. It never took much at any time to arouse happiness in her, and still less to quench it; as a firefly lets flare his rocket, and shivers into darkness again. But a firefly can use his gay little fireworks for protection also, and if you catch him and handle him roughly, he sometimes runs off into obscurity, leaving his lantern shining brightly in your hand. Doubtless his heart is broken for its loss, for Nature has no more to give him, so far as I know.

Rome led her back upstairs, and they sat down in a recess at the end of the hall.

"And are you really so glad to see your little sister again?" she said, with a moist smile. "It's so nice to be liked. Most people don't like me. I don't know why."

"Most people are jackasses."

"Isn't that a swear word? They're so particular here about slang. Miss Maud" —

"Where are the red cheeks you used to have?"

"You've got them, I guess. You are n't nearly so much of an Injun as you were. And what funny clothes you wear! You look like a German Jew."

"Men have been killed for smaller insults than that. I will merely ask for another kiss."

She turned her cheek quickly, before he could touch her lips, and this was annoying, for her

mouth was the prettiest one he had seen for many a day.

“You said you had some amendments to my housekeeping plans that would make them all right. It’s so dreadful not to be liked and to be in the way and to be accused of things. Of course, it’s my fault, but” —

“I take it you followed my suggestion and didn’t mention your ideas to any one here,” said Biznet, looking oddly at her.

“Of course. I—I never talk to them about my ideas. They don’t seem to understand, some way.”

“I want to wait a little while before telling you what my amendment is. You mightn’t like it. But we’ll fix things some way, and don’t you fret. — And so I can only have the cheek? I wonder what lucky fellow the lips are reserved for?”

“Oh, don’t—say such things.”

“There, there, liebchen; at least you needn’t be afraid of me.”

Then the sad voice of the Burmese gong announced breakfast, its slow vibration curling up like a thin wave of incense smoke, through the banister sticks, around the chandelier, touching their ears delicately. “I’m glad that thing is still in existence,” said Rome. “It wouldn’t seem home without it.”

“I don’t know,” said Kitty. “It takes away my appetite some way, as if it said, ‘Oh, what’s the use of taking all this trouble to eat and eat and eat — one dies so soon.’”

There were coffee, baked beans, brown bread, slices of delicately broiled ham. It had always been so on Sunday morning. The only difference now was that Rome preferred no cream in his coffee, and found greater æsthetic enjoyment in the deep amber gleam of the perfect beverage as it lay in the bright spoon.

A ray of sun crept through the vines and twinkled on the coffee urn, by Miss Tracy, and reaching across the table, burnished Billy's fair hair and pink cheeks until he edged away from it, which brought him some six inches nearer Kitty. In the centre of the table were half-open roses, the raindrops of the night still upon their petals, their odor mingling daintily with that of the breakfast — with as much appropriateness as if a woman in evening gown should take a notion to do her marketing so attired. Everything about the table was peaceful, well-bred, good-natured. Maud was an expert at impersonal conversation about weather, a book, anything far enough away or abstract enough to hurt nobody. If Kitty had fallen into a way of being absent and sad, one did not mind. She was supposed to be thinking of her difficulties at the Normal.

But Rome, watching, was positive, when she dropped her napkin and Billy picked it up for her, that he squeezed her hand under cover of it, and he wondered if Maud chose to sit by himself and opposite Kitty because the place was of strategic value if one wished to watch.

As they sat on the veranda after breakfast he

picked up the roll of music which Maud was to take to church. It seemed she sang in the choir:—

“ Love not the world,
Nor the things that are in the world;
For the world passeth away,
And the lust thereof.”

Kitty came out in a gray, nun-like gown, wearing a bunch of sweet peas, hooded like novices. She looked inexpressibly churchly, as she sat down and began to draw on a pair of white gloves. It seemed absurd that there should be any difficulty whatever in stretching gloves to fit such small hands. It occurred to Biznet that it would be within the privileges of a cousin to assist at the ceremony, but while he was doing so Billy strolled up with his dogs and eyed them gloomily, which attitude on Billy's part caused Rome to linger unnecessarily over the slim, blue-veined wrist, and deepened that peaceful Sabbath feeling which he had toward all the world, as if the discontent on Billy's face had eliminated the last shadow from himself.

It was odd, on that walk to church, to see the boys and girls he had known in the high school. Some were married. That seemed unreasonable. Patience Bartlett, the girl whom he had been almost in love with, was dead, which seemed like something read in a book. He remembered that her hair had been very beautiful, brown, like bronze, and curly. Her lips had been very red, and she had been over-fond of being kissed. Then, there was Benny Wells, swinging along with a Bible in

his hand, his frock coat wrinkling between the shoulders, and Gladys, wearing an enormous bunch of yellow marigolds pinned to her aniline pink gown. That was all as it should be, and their faces were as smug and good as they had been at school—when they stole the Regents' question papers, and were almost caught. Rome had shared in the profits of that raid, but he had no great affection for his fellow sinners. They greeted him warmly and fell in behind the Tracys in the procession across the Green.

“He is n't changed one bit,” he heard Gladys say, and a low murmur from Benny, in which he only distinguished the word “Canuck.” And this set him meditating on the many different ways in which he was superior to Benny Wells, and how he would demonstrate it. He was walking with Miss Tracy. Kitty was behind with Maud. Billy had stayed at home with pipe and dogs and the magazines.

“Good morning, Miss Tracy,” said a voice, and on the other side of the little lady he saw the gleam of a white gown, and a face, amused and curious, peering at him under the edge of the sunshade which he was holding.

“So this is the celebrity,” said Bess Heathway, holding out her hand in a quick, awkward way. She looked back at the crowd of church-goers behind them. “There won't be many empty pews this morning,” she said, with obvious application. “I'm not sure that is n't why I'm coming to church myself. I'm not morally obliged to go.

I've reckoned it up, you see — at college we had to go to chapel once a day, and every time I went I said, 'There's a Sunday off;' I went enough then to last me ten years, I estimated."

"Why, Bessie," remonstrated Miss Tracy. Biznet grinned.

"I thought you believed in infant damnation," said he.

"Why, Rome!" said Miss Tracy.

"Did you?" replied Bess, serenely. "Maybe I did. Isn't this a lovely morning! I used to think the Lord made Sundays especially, — that nice Sundays smelt different from other days. I said that once to Mr. Wells, and he put it in a sermon. How proud I was!"

In the church was the usual whispering of silk, starch, hymn-book leaves. The women bent forward devoutly, with their foreheads upon the pews in front. Biznet, covering his eyes with his hand, had a homesick qualm for the holy water and the incense of St. Mary's Chapel, whose bell was again clamoring for wandering lambs, interfering with the rhythm of the deep-mouthed peal from their own spire.

Then the organ began to make sullen remarks under unskillful fingers, and he sat up stiffly, feeling that his ears clung flatly to his head in protest. He recognized Maud's hat among the others in the choir, and Benny Wells's red head, — just matching his sister's marigolds. Mr. Wells, sitting in his chair behind the pulpit, one plump knee crossed over the other, his white hand with short, square-

tipped fingers before his eyes, was a landmark, and something unchangeable in a land of change. His voice in prayer was the same; the prayer itself was the same; and one felt that the Person whom he addressed had not in any way developed broader views nor departed from his curious prejudices during the last few years.

“ Love not the world,
Nor the things that are in the world ;
For the world passeth away,
And the lust thereof.”

Such was the very good advice offered by the choir. Biznet looked thoughtfully at Kitty's demure profile and the already perishing sweet peas under her chin, and he did n't see why one should n't love a thing merely because it is perishable.

Maud sang well. Some singers would have thought they must attempt to express pity and concern for that habit of men of holding tightly to their fragile toys, and for the necessity which wrenches their fingers open; but Maud chose a large and bland indifference, — the attitude of a child that puffs away dandelion down with its breath. He liked her better after hearing her sing, for she did it in a sensible way, without fuss.

And after the long sermon was the usual long Sunday dinner, with several of its courses served cold out of regard to the servants, and irresistible sleepiness settled upon the afternoon. Miss Tracy took her Bible and concordance and fell asleep over them in a steamer chair behind the wistaria. Maud read Emerson in the hammock. Kitty and Roman

Biznet in the garden considered a book of blue prints that he had brought home with him. Billy with his dogs strolled up to them with an expression of uneasiness, and then strolled away again in the direction of Bess Heathway, the glimmer of whose dress was visible through the trees. Biznet looked after him meditatively, and then glanced stealthily at Kitty, — whose mouth corners were twitching, and whose eyes were very bright under her lashes, — and as he looked at her her glance flickered sidelong to him, and she giggled.

“So!” said Biznet.

Presently Kitty declared herself too sleepy to live, and went into the house; and Roman, following, found Dr. Winthrop and a cigar seated in mild obscurity on the veranda steps. He seemed smaller, older, yellower than he had been three years before, more ready, perhaps, to admit himself an invalid, — for he did not rise and come forward in his pleasure at seeing the young man, but sat where he was, beaming and holding out one hand in greeting all the time Rome was coming across the lawn.

Miss Tracy was still somnolent behind the wistaria, though she had tried to get up a discussion with the doctor about the Sunday-school lesson, which was something about “sounding brass and tinkling cymbal” and people that “have not charity.”

The doctor said nothing as he shook Roman’s hand, but looked him over with quiet satisfaction, yet with a lurking anxiety.

“But what are you doing with red cheeks?” he said at length. “You have n’t any right to red cheeks.”

“I came home to get you to prescribe for them,” said Rome. But there was serious meaning under his careless tone which brought additional sharpness to the doctor’s scrutiny.

“You’ve been thickening up some, too,” he said. “They’ve been making quite a German of you. Beer and sausages, I suppose?”

“Yes,” said Biznet, “and music.”

“I understand people are predicting great things for you. How about that?”

“Oh, that’s as may be!”

“Let’s hear that big fiddle of yours.”

Rome brought his ’cello to the veranda and gave his first performance in Cosmos, choosing things of simple melody for the doctor’s pleasure, and afterward, when Maud appeared, the most intricate things he knew.

Miss Tracy wept; the doctor leaned back with a smile of absolute enjoyment; and Maud, standing in the doorway, looked at Biznet very intently, studying his hands, his face, as though it were there that the interest lay. Kitty stole out of her room into the upper hall to listen, but crept back yawning, and went to sleep again.

Rome ended with a rather brilliant and showy composition, which he announced as his own.

“H’m!” said the doctor. “How badly conceited are you?”

“I don’t know,” said Rome. There had been

a lighting and softening of his face as he played, — a curious erasing of any lines that might be called sensual or sinister.

“I should think you had a pretty good right to be, if anybody has any right,” said the doctor. “It’s a youthful disease, like the measles and whooping cough.” He smoked for a while thoughtfully, and then delivered one of his small lectures.

“Conceit is silly. A hen cackles because she has laid an egg, — as if she had any choice in the matter!

“The germs of books and of music are n’t generated spontaneously in the brains out of which they sprout. The air is thick with ideas, drifting about with every wind like dandelion down. Most of them, maybe all, come from lives gone to seed. You see a white-headed old fellow” (he touched his gray hair) “ready to go to pieces presently. But the whole of him won’t descend to Orcus, — only the withered stem and leaves; all that is worth while in his brain will somehow get out into the drift of things again. You can’t chase the metaphor indefinitely,” he apologized.

“Yes,” said Biznet dreamily, “people talk an awful lot of rot about inspiration, don’t they? There were some long-haired fellows over there used to make me ill. It’s so contradictory, you know, to pretend you’re inspired by some outside influence, and then go around cackling over the big thing you’ve done. I could never make out that there was anything to it but being built on a certain plan to begin with, and then working like the

devil for the rest. Inspiration means that you enjoy your work."

Maud leaned forward. "But go back to the doctor's dandelion simile. Your being built in a certain way means good soil; your working like the what's his name is the making it ready: then along comes a little dandelion seed and tumbles in, — and *that's* your inspiration!"

"Um!" said Biznet. "That's all right, I guess. I wish dandelions were a more profitable crop."

CHAPTER IV

PEGASUS PROVES A SENTIMENTALIST

SQUIRE HEATHWAY said that Roman Biznet had a bad face, and that he did n't want him hanging around. His daughter set her jaw to the exact counterpart of her father's, could one have seen beneath his thick white beard, and argued the matter.

"He has had a good environment," said she, "and the racial characteristics of his ancestors, if you're talking about phrenology, are very different from those of the Anglo-Saxons, so it is n't fair to judge him by comparison. Besides, he is so wrapped up in his music he has n't had time to get very bad."

"He has a bad face," said Squire Heathway. "He has a low forehead and looks tricky. There's no good Injun but a dead Injun, and I won't have him hanging around."

"But, papa, he is n't hanging around. Good gracious! If I were Gladys Wells you might be anxious, but I'm not silly like other girls. So does Billy come over here, and Benny Wells, and I can't refuse to receive him when he comes with Billy, so long as he behaves — as he always does. And you like to hear him play, — you know you do."

“Young Tracy is a fine fellow,” said Squire Heathway.

“Yes,” said Bess; “I hope he’ll marry Kitty Conto.”

The squire grunted. He had other ideas, but knew in what century he was living, and that young people attended to their own marrying and giving in marriage now.

It was about the time when Elizabeth won this partial victory over her father that Roman Biznet began the practice of watching from his window until the figure of the squire, white felt hat, gold-headed cane, ancient Bose at his side, had passed down the walk and disappeared under the arching elms, before he himself strolled over to the Heathway grounds, to swing Bess in her hammock, or read German with her, or tell stories of student life abroad.

It seemed odd to him that a girl with such a pretty profile and hair that lighted up so well in the sunshine should have registered a vow never to marry. By and by he began to think it was a pity. It did not occur to him to question the durability of such a vow, nor its wisdom. He had always had a strangely humble respect for Elizabeth Heathway’s wisdom since the day when she was valedictorian of her class at the high school and he was ingloriously dropped.

He constantly made new discoveries about her. One day he was annoyed at a rip in her sleeve that she had pinned up instead of mending neatly. The next he found something attractive about it,

because her arm was so full and round, and because it proved her mind above trifles.

He decided she was a pretty good friend for a fellow to have, and planned to take her into his confidence about Kitty before long.

Elizabeth had been taking old Pegasus for a long constitutional. Pegasus went slowly, now, with an uncertain movement in one of his hind legs, and he was renewing his youth as a saddle horse by galloping in harness whenever he could get a chance, though his enemies said he got over the ground no faster in this manner than when he was allowed to walk at a gait which did not interfere with switching the flies with his tail, which was long and gray, like an old man's beard, and generally in a beautiful state of crimp and gloss from Elizabeth's skillful fingers. There was a saying in Cosmos that Pegasus's hind leg had pretty nearly paid for the veterinary's new house, but this was a malicious slander, traceable directly to Billy, whereupon Bess in retaliation had vilified his dogs with a wealth of adjective which left them a by-word throughout the town.

It was late in the afternoon. At that time of the year afternoon stretched out long after tea-time. Bess leaned back in the phaeton, holding the reins laxly, and Pegasus drowsed along, picking his own way in a state of somnambulism, — even turning into a ditch with absent-minded skill, to let a towering load of hay go by, which Bess had not noticed. Foolish white butterflies fluttered up about his

hoofs, and one of them perched on Elizabeth's glove.

She stared at it unseeingly. The crease between her eyebrows was unusually deep. And she was gowned with astonishing neatness, a trim gray figure with everything put on straight, just as Kitty Conto, that little pattern, would have had it. Even the white veil about her hat, instead of being crumpled and soiled, was crisp with newness and hemmed at the ends.

"Well, what's happened?" her mother had exclaimed when she appeared thus. "You almost look as if you were some relation to me."

Pegasus, striking the main road, pricked up his ears, and lunged into his absurd canter, planning to go home, but Elizabeth, waking up at the same time, turned his head another way and sent him moping through French Hollow and up the narrow sumac-bordered road that led past the little empty house where Alphonsine Conto had once lived. It was haunted, of course, and vacant but for that. The windows were broken; the door hung sideways from its hinges. But leaning against the window was a spindling hollyhock, with two feeble red flowers, whose great-great-grandmother had been tended by Alphonsine.

Pegasus halted, turning an eye of mild inquiry upon Bess, as she descended from the carriage, and walked hesitatingly through the jungle of weeds to the door. She looked about her a little fearfully and then pushed it open.

From a broken window a beam of late, reddened-

ing sunshine lay upon the kitchen table. There were no chairs, for they had been long ago acquired by neighbors who needed them more than they feared the "haunt." But it seemed to Bess merely desolate and empty, whatever horror had once clung about it having evaporated. And even if there were a ghost there, Alphonsine had been a kindly soul. Bess remembered many of her delightful, dreadful stories, — of the black cat that got to be seven years old, and at that age being doomed to death by Alphonsine's father, had flown to the ceiling and lit there upside down like a fly, walking about and swearing, — "Sacrée — s-s-sacrée!" And there was the loup-garou who chopped wood by day, but at night left his wife and baby and went out to chew his neighbor's throat. Bess reflected sorrowfully that Alphonsine's reality had proved as dreadful as her fancies.

She had not meant to do it, but now that she was there, she went to the table and peered beyond it at the place where people said there was still a large brown stain. It was there, dingy, and vague of outline under the drifted dust. Elizabeth had expected herself to quail at this, but no — she found only a cold and curious feeling within her, as when one looks at things in a museum. But something else made her jump back, and the blood sang in her ears. It was one petal of a geranium, red, bright, and fresh, and it lay by the table leg, where the stain had spread under and crept along in a narrow channel.

"Rome has been here!" she said, and looked

about as if he might step out of a corner. "They think he's heartless and cynical, and does n't care about things, but he's been here — alone."

It must have been he, dandy that he was, and always with a red flower in his buttonhole.

She picked up the petal; then replaced it as she had found it. There seemed something symbolic about it as it lay there, though just how she could not have told. But the picture in her mind of Biznet standing in the desolate room, looking down sadly upon that gloomy reminder of his childhood's tragedy, was as vivid as if she had seen him there. And she found herself wishing that she might see in reality the expression upon his face which she fancied it had then worn. She wondered if he had stood uncovered, like a man at a grave — if there had been a lump in his throat. There was one in hers as she considered the question.

As she came out the robins were in full cry from the tops of hop-poles, from the elms, — their little faces and red breasts turned to the setting sun. The light was all red gold, with purple shadows among the hills, and the various sounds of French Hollow came up pleasantly as the people buzzed like insects over their supper-getting.

Just why Bess was happy as she turned Pegasus toward home and drove back through the sunset, she could not have told. Perhaps it is always pleasant to catch a stray glimpse of something good in the depths of somebody else's soul.

As she passed the post-office she saw him standing in the doorway, lighting a cigarette. There

was a bunch of red geranium in his buttonhole, and one of the flowers was dropping to pieces, two petals lying at his feet as he stood there. She smiled at the accuracy of her reasoning.

“Don’t you want a ride home?” she asked.

He accepted with pleased surprise, dropping the freshly lit cigarette beside the red petals as he stepped forward.

“I’ve had quite a long walk, and I’m pretty tired,” he admitted.

“Where did you go?” She did not expect him to tell the truth. But he did. He settled down in a rather inelegant and tired attitude at his end of the seat and did not answer at once. Then he said abruptly, “I went to Phosy’s house.”

Bess could think of nothing to say. It occurred to her that he must have something on his mind to tell the truth in such an abrupt, unskillful way.

“I wonder why I went?” he added presently. “I wish I had n’t.”

“I was very fond of Phosy when I was a little girl,” said Bess. “It seems a great pity the mystery never could be cleared up, does n’t it?”

“Yes,” he answered dryly, “a great pity.”

She glanced at him in surprise. His light and cheerful mockery she was accustomed to; but this mood was one that might be tragically bitter and earnest, if she read his face right in the growing dusk.

“Let’s drive around a bit more, won’t you?” he said. “I’m not in just the mood to go — home, yet.”

She turned down a road that led along the banks of the Powasket toward the sunset and the even horizon of the St. Lawrence country.

"I'd rather you would n't tell anybody I went there," he said. "I don't know why I told you, I'm sure. Not that there's any reason why I should n't go, but I have a morbid dislike of comment. I even dread what success I may have in New York next winter. People are such fools."

"I understand," said Bess.

"Do you? I had an idea you were fond of glory and honor and so forth."

"I used to be. One outgrows it, though, don't you think?"

"Yes. I seem to remember having it once, but it was when I was a boy and lived at Phosy's. It's odd how some things can knock one's notions endwise. I've sometimes wondered in just what way I'd have been different if that had n't happened. Do you know you've improved wonderfully? You have n't boxed my ears since I came back. You're quite welcome to, you know, if you like."

The serious mood had vanished in the middle of a sentence, and he was smiling the twisted smile that was like Kitty's, as his eyes shone through the dusk.

"I will box them," she replied, "if it's necessary. You may be sure of that."

"Remember infant damnation?"

"I do, inasmuch as this is the third time you've mentioned it since you came back."

"You're quite sure you don't believe the babies get the 'easiest room in hell'?"

"Quite sure."

"You're a Buddhist now, are n't you?"

"I don't know. Are you?"

"Me? I'm a Roman Catholic. I went to the Cathedral regularly abroad, but don't tell Miss Tracy. I knew the organist. He was a bird!"

"Do you hear that?" asked Elizabeth suddenly.

"What?"

She motioned back with her head. "The Cosmos band. They're practicing on the Green. We're going to have a big Fourth, you know."

"What in the world are they playing?" asked Biznet, and laid his hand on the reins to stop the carriage and the noise of the wheels. After a moment's listening he doubled up with mirth. "And this," he gasped, "is Fame!"

"Well," said Bess, "what is it? I can't make it out."

"Oh, nothing but a march that I wrote in my misguided youth. Somebody else has the copyright, and this is the sixth time I've heard it since I came back. I wish I had the money it's bringing in to somebody, and I wish, too, I could tack some other fellow's name to it."

"But why? I think it's splendid," said Bess, listening.

It was so far away that not much was audible but the throb of the drum and the melody carried by the cornet. Biznet listened, too, with a queer little smile that was partly of enjoyment.

“I wonder,” he said, “what’s become of the young chap who wrote that and thought he was doing such great things? It is n’t so bad, for a kid that did n’t know how. What becomes of the people we used to be, anyhow? Is that down in your philosophy? It ought to be, for I have n’t met Bess Heathway since I came back. I’ve looked for her, too.”

She shook her head with a smile. “She’s just as well gone, don’t you think? She was an impossible little creature.”

“Do you suppose she and little Romy Biznet are still scrapping somewhere?”

Bess turned the carriage about. “It’s quite probable — making snowballs of the ‘snows of yester year’!”

“And little Kitty Conto is still too young to play their big games, and Billy Tracy is still older and wiser than all three.”

“And Pegasus is still a colt,” concluded Bess. “I wonder where?”

Biznet leaned back with his hands behind his head, one foot dangling out over the wheel. They were facing the Adirondack horizon again, where the mountains were like a bank of dark clouds, and the stars were out.

The Cosmos band was not unpleasant. Biznet hummed the march they were playing, laughing now and then when the instruments stuttered, flatted, or lost the rhythm.

“It spoils pleasure to know too much,” said Bess. “Now, to me, that little thread of music,

mixing itself up with the night, the sound of the carriage wheels and the crickets, is satisfactory in every way. Why don't you take it as a whole instead of letting little discords spoil everything for you?"

"But I do. Only I see the fun of it, as you don't. Yes, I can take it as a whole, just as you do. Seems funny to think of the chap that wrote it, though. He took things so seriously!"

"This road is going to take us right past them," said Bess apprehensively.

"Well, you said you liked it."

"But Pegasus will dance!"

"That will be nice."

"Oh! will it? Perhaps we can get by in a hurry during an intermission."

"I thought you didn't grudge Pegasus anything. Billy was saying" —

"I know. About Pegasus's hind leg and La Barge's new house. Tray killed some of our chickens the other day. I'm going to shoot those mongrels next time I get a chance."

"Mongrels! Why, their pedigree" —

"And Pegasus is the best horse in the county. But I don't like him to dance. It isn't dignified, and pleases little boys. He just stands still in one spot and goes up and down."

"I'm glad I came," said Biznet.

"But perhaps we can get by in a hurry during an intermission."

"Perhaps," said Biznet, straightening up in an alert way. "Don't you want me to drive for a while?" he insinuated.

“Not you!”

They let the horse amble along slowly until the last note of “Marching through Georgia” had flattened into silence, and then Bess rattled the whip in the socket, a proceeding as near to corporal punishment as Pegasus knew. He puffed indignantly and lumbered into a gallop. “Oh dear me!” said Bess, “we’ll never get by at this rate.”

“Better let him walk,” suggested Rome.

“And he used to be the best trotter! I don’t see what’s got into him. *You* remember how he was when we were all children.”

“*Sic transit.* ’Tis n’t so hard on his hind leg, I suppose.”

Bess rattled the whip again nervously; they were in sight of the band-stand now. The leader was wiping his forehead. There were many of the townspeople strolling about the Green, and all the small boys were gathered at the fence, which consisted of horizontal iron bars, on which one could swing by the hands. If the Cosmos male population is unusually strong in the hands and wrists, it is probably due to unremitting practice in youth upon these bars of the Green fence.

“I used to do that,” murmured Rome wistfully. “I’d like to do it again. I’d like to steal apples, too!”

“They are n’t ripe yet.”

“There’s nothing so good as an apple three weeks after it’s been in flower,” said Rome sadly.

“Gracious! And you live to tell the tale!”

They were just passing the band-stand; Bess looked anxiously over her shoulder, set her teeth, and took the whip out of the socket. But Biznet, as the tap of the leader's baton sounded, quietly replaced the whip and gathered the reins out of her hands.

"I'm a better friend to Pegasus than you are," he said; and the band, with a toot and a bang, started up his own march again. Bess, who had been wildly indignant, decided that the joke was not entirely on herself after all. And Pegasus danced. He threw up his head and kicked out with his hoofs, and spun round on his hind legs, while the little boys left the fence and made a circle about him.

"You see," said Biznet, "I'm killing two stones with one bird. It isn't only Pegasus I'm pleasing, but pretty nearly the whole rising generation of Cosmos. These youngsters don't often get a free circus, — neither do I."

"I shall pay you back for this some day," said Bess meditatively. She was taking it quite philosophically, having shrunk back as far as possible into shadow. "I don't know just how I'll do it, but I'll think up something."

"I don't doubt," said Rome, "but just think of Pegasus!"

"He does seem to enjoy it," said Bess. "I wonder why? Why do horses like music, do you suppose? And why do dogs hate it so? I nearly laughed myself ill yesterday when you were trying to practice on your 'cello and Bose and Tray

tuned up. They got the best of it, too, until you banged your window shut."

"That's a thing I've often wondered about," said Rome, "particularly since I've got down more to the science of music and see how abstract and abstruse it really is. It makes me sick to have a woman mopping her eyes while I play, yet here is Pegasus dancing around to this old idea of mine, and I take it as a compliment! And the dogs,—well, I fancy they liked it, too, but a dog is a sentimentalist, like a woman."

The march ended, and the excitement ebbed from the old horse's hoofs.

"I have to thank you for a most delightful evening," said Biznet, as he left her at the barn door.

CHAPTER V

ROMAN BIZNET'S AMENDMENT

IF Maud Tracy had not roused Biznet's antagonism he might not have discovered any great tenderness for Kitty. But there was a poison in him. If it stagnated, he was sour and diseased throughout. If it found an outlet it left a very good sort of fellow, companionable and soft-hearted. It was a process of mental and moral surgery, merely, for the reduction of fever. And Maud bled him of his black blood, like a judiciously applied leech.

But she did n't know it — for a while — for he found, on sorting over his stock of masks and dominos, a sweet, grim suavity to turn toward her. It was long before she suspected that he wore a mask at all, and longer still before he dropped it.

“Can you help me for a moment, Mr. Biznet?” Maud was coming from the attic, carrying a picture.

“With pleasure.”

“I was going to hang this in Kitty's room; it seems a pity to keep pretty things tucked away.”

She set the frame on a divan and stood off from it, dusting her palms together.

“The Fornarina.” He laughed slightly, muttering something under his breath.

“I beg pardon?”

“I was just quoting a line of Faust.”

“I like quotations; I did n't catch it.”

“Ein rothes Mäuschen ihr aus dem Munde.”

“Oh, you mean she looks wicked? It had n't occurred to me. She is pretty, anyway, and Kitty needs cheering up.”

“So!” he said softly, but as he helped to hang the picture he kept whistling under his breath the Red Mouse melody which his grandfather's ghost had taught him. The Fornarina smiled slyly.

Kitty came in and thanked them both sweetly for their trouble.

“How good you are to me!” she said to Maud, and kissed her cheek.

“You little Judas!” reflected Biznet, and when Maud was gone out took a kiss himself.

“You said you would n't, Romy. Won't anybody at all do as I ask?”

“Come out in the garden, Pussy; I believe you've been sewing all day.”

“I was helping Miss Maud put some afghan strips together. Will you tell me about that 'amendment' you spoke of? I'm so anxious. I've been thinking so much about it. I should feel more independent with you. Tell me.”

“Perhaps I will,” he answered. They were standing in the hall. He glanced swiftly to right and left. There was no one, and he kissed her mouth, hotly. “You think we're brother and sister? You must marry me if you come to New York. I want you, Pussy — for a wife. Do I

hurt you? I want you to feel — I could make you forget Billy.”

Then he released her, for there was a step in the hall below as of Maud returning. Kitty fled into her room and locked the door: but first she looked at him over her shoulder, and he never forgot the terrified misery of her face.

That afternoon he spent in the society of his 'cello. There were simplicity and reliability in her stiff, brown body and responsive strings. Women were too strangely complicated. And he seemed to have found new complications in himself. If you hold a string, so, with a steady finger, and draw the bow — so — you know what you are going to get. But if you feel that you yourself have been taken in hand and that unknown fingers are tuning you, that your own vitals are become catgut, you naturally feel a flutter of anxiety about Fate's skill in the matter. The breaking of a string will be painful. You hope there will be enough resin on the bow. Then you perceive that other people are also being put in tune; they are off the key, their strings break, — will the overture never begin? For the discord is confusing; and that great music for which we are being prepared — can it be played at all upon such toys as we?

Roman talked the matter over with his 'cello during the afternoon, and although they reached no particular conclusion, he felt “more like a white man” at dinner time.

Kitty's place was vacant. It was Billy who asked sharply where she was. "She has a headache," answered Miss Tracy, but there was no sympathy in her tone. Sometimes there was a harsh, dry quality in the little lady's voice, and when you heard it and looked, startled, into her eyes to understand the reason, you would see a redness of the lids there, and a fine veining of blood in the eye itself. It was not the redness that comes from tears, but was an hereditary characteristic in the Tracy family. There had been warriors among them,—people with tempers.

"Kitty is so mortified over her failure at the Normal," said Maud kindly. "Of course it is hard to look back on lost opportunities."

Billy brought his hand down on the table with a crash. It must be pleasant not to be bought and paid for,—to be able to let fly opinions from one's mouth without fearing the effect on the bread and butter that goes into it.

"The idea of making her a teacher was idiotic. If I had been at home"—

"Billy! To your aunt! For shame!"

"If I had been at home, it never would have been tried,—when there are good schools for girls, where they are not browbeaten and worked to death."

"You speak as though Kitty had some claim on your aunt."

"Yes, I thought aunt Em was fond of her, and wanted to make her a gentlewoman and of our own

class; but it seems not. I thought—I'd have given my money, if that was all. Why did you tell me it was her own choice?"

"Do you accuse me of prevaricating? It was her own choice." Miss Tracy rose in a stately manner, and left the room.

Biznet heard her light step in the upper hall, heard her knock at Kitty's door. He pushed back from the table, his eyes upon the door through which she had gone, his napkin pressed tightly over his lips, his attitude as one who listens keenly. Maud sat back, frowning slightly, crumpling her napkin into precise folds and creases as it lay under her hand upon the table.

"Billy, gentlemen don't make scenes," she said at length, gently. Billy became humble and contrite at once.

"I know it, sis, and I'm a brute. But I know I'm right about Kitty. She's such a little thing, I"—He leaned forward as if on the point of making a confidence; then glanced at Biznet and drew back.

"Your aunt has been perfectly sweet to her always," went on Maud. "Why, she's gone up now to try to comfort her!"

"I know," said Billy; "aunt Em's an angel."

Biznet rose quietly, without making excuses to Maud, and strolled out into the garden, feeling in the back of his head that she watched him as he went.

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It was late twilight, a faint smear of sunset still

showing beyond the St. Lawrence. He sat for half an hour or so examining an unlit cigarette, with a vacant stare. Throughout the garden the roses were holding their last court: the last buds were open now, and with their odor was a faint suggestion of the decay of fallen petals. A light, uneven step sounded on the cinders behind him.

“Rome!”

“Well, Kitty,” he answered gently, without turning. He had thought they might drive her to him; but his cheeks were still hot from his repulse that morning. He knew now how factitious that wooing had been. She was his little sister, and he had hurt her.

“Rome, I want to talk to you as if — everything between us were as I imagined before this morning. You used to be so good! And I have n’t anybody else.”

“I promise, Pussy.”

“Rome, I’ve got to go away from here. I don’t know what Miss Tracy thinks I’ve done, but” —

“So the final row has come, has it?” said Biznet sadly. “Too bad!”

“If I could only die! I’ve thought about it all day. Perhaps I’m cowardly. I thought about the different ways to die — and then — the world looked so pretty from my window that I wanted to stay in it.”

“Don’t, Pussy. Was the row about Billy?”

“Yes.” She sat down beside him and bent over

with her face in her hands. "They called me an adventuress."

Biznet laughed discordantly. He found himself in a sudden rage against Billy. If Billy loved her, why did n't he — Biznet would not have submitted to a couple of women, if he had been free like Billy. "Who called you that?"

"Miss Tracy. But I think Maud gave her the idea."

Biznet sorted Billy and his sister into one package with his enemies.

"Since I've made such a failure at the Normal, they've perfectly hated me; they seem to think I fail on purpose. Rome, you don't know how I tried! What can I do? Of course I see now that my plan about keeping house for you was not — well-bred — and I think what you said this morning — I think you worked yourself up to it. It was my fault for having been so stupid. But could n't I be a salesgirl or something in New York? Or I could be a servant."

"Would you mind telling me if Billy asked you to marry him?"

"Yes, — oh, yes!"

"Why did you refuse?"

"If I had n't, I'd have been the adventuress they called me. Besides, I think it was only a fancy on his part."

"You must n't mind my asking, if I'm to help. Did you care so very much about him, Pussy?"

"I hardly know — I tried not to think. Don't ask me!"

"If it weren't for Billy, could you think of me?"

"I don't know — perhaps. You're all I have."

"I'd try to make you happy, Pussy; I could support you nicely. I have been thinking I could make some payments to Miss Tracy soon."

"You may be right," said Kitty wearily.

"We belong to Miss Tracy," he said, half to himself.

"Yes, that's it, — bought and paid for, just like a couple of wax dolls. Oh dear!"

"Well, she's been very good to us, you know. Think of what I owe her!"

"Is it more than you can pay, do you think? Would our marriage please her enough to help pay it off?" Kitty asked. She had taken his hand in hers, dragging and twisting his ring with the red stone until it cut his finger. He took the restless little hands in his, where they still worked and twisted between his palms.

"Yes. And it would please me, Pussy; I thought of it long ago."

"I supposed you would fall in love with Bess Heathway, or else some great singer. I'm such a dull little thing! — I don't know enough to appreciate you."

"They say, you know," said Rome, "that people learn to care after they are married."

"Do you think we should?"

"I care now. Perhaps you would learn."

"I'll try."

"Then shall I tell Miss Tracy we are engaged?"

“If you like.”

“Will you marry me in the fall, before I have to go back to New York?”

“Yes.”

CHAPTER VI

ADLOR ENCOUNTERS THE LOUP-GAROU AGAIN

THEY did not linger in the early starlight, like newly plighted lovers, but walked back slowly to the house with bent heads and unsmiling mouths. She leaned on his arm with dragging weariness.

“Who is that?” asked Kitty suddenly. A shadow was going quietly across the lawn, parallel with them, and gliding stealthily from shrub to shrub.

“It’s Adlor,” answered Rome, puzzled. “I thought he was a fairly honorable chap, too, but he has evidently been listening to us, or trying to. Perhaps he wants to pay me back for that scare I gave him when we were boys. I’ve told you, you know, how I drove him and his pals out of Miss Tracy’s orchard. I sometimes think I must have scared him too hard, and done something or other to a piece of his brain. Even to this day he more than half believes I am a loup-garou. There’s nothing so easy to get as the reputation of being a devil. Well, I had lots of fun out of him.”

“Adlor is ‘one good boy,’” said Kitty. “If Miss Tracy had only left me alone, and Mrs. Orleans, or somebody like her, had taken me instead,

I might have married Adlor, and we should have done very well."

"You don't mean he is in love with you?"

"I'm afraid so. He sometimes looks at me as though he were. Perhaps if you had n't asked me to marry you, just now, I might have gone back with him to French Hollow after all!"

"I can hardly imagine that!"

"Well," Kitty sighed, "Adlor is a good boy, and I don't quite see how my wonderful education has made me so very much better than he is. I hope he does n't feel bad about me. Those things hurt so!"

At the end of the veranda was the glimmer of dresses. "It's Miss Tracy and Maud," said Rome in Kitty's ear. "Go upstairs and I'll have it out with them. What! Without kissing me good night?" He spoke lightly, but with a shadow of sternness in his voice. She came back, and turned her cheek obediently. He looked at her fixedly, and she glanced up, as if not understanding why the kiss did not come. "Oh!" she said at last, smiling, the merest twitch of one corner of her mouth; "but I don't see what difference it makes," she added when their lips had touched.

"A mere matter of form," said Rome ironically; "I believe it's a custom among lovers."

Kitty ran swiftly upstairs as though fearing to be called back, and Rome sauntered over to the women at the end of the veranda.

"Kitty and I have been out in the rose-walk this evening."

“Have you?” said Miss Emily, with a guilty start which was a gleam of hope.

“Yes, we had quite a long talk, and I have something to tell you. Don’t go, Miss Maud, for I want you to hear it too. In fact I want you both to congratulate me.”

“Oh,” said Miss Tracy, trembling greatly; “I — I — with all my heart, Rome. I want you both happy, I’m sure; I want everybody to be happy.” And the little lady, shedding sudden tears at the end of her scheming, ran into the house.

Maud congratulated him with well-bred sincerity; and yet — as they stood there alone, her hand trembled on meeting his, her voice died away, and her eyes were frightened and miserable as he saw them through the dark.

He watched her out of sight with a satisfied leer, then lit a cigarette and went for a stroll about the grounds, chuckling to feel what a fine fellow he was, reveling as he had when a child in his mischievous knowledge of the world at night, his companionship with its mysteries. He had solved his problems with credit, and was gay with freedom. He felt as though he were even capable of deciding that continually rustling leafy debate of the branches, silhouetted grotesquely against the light spot in the sky where the moon was rising, and wagging solemnly in portentous assent or dissent. They had gone over the same debate, and the moon had risen just so, like a great red fire, in that same notch between the hills, when he was a boy. The world seemed to have kept its

habit of youngness; he saw no good reason why he should grow old himself.

Turning the corner of the house he stopped suddenly at sight of a figure like an Aztec mummy sitting stolidly beneath Kitty's window, its back to the house, rigid and silent as if on guard.

"What! Adlor again! 'Those things hurt so!' eh? Actually crying!"

He came softly behind the man and leaned over him, still undiscovered. "What, tears, Adlor?" he asked with soft mockery.

Adlor jumped up with a frightened grunt. "Loup-garou!" he stuttered.

"Yes," said Biznet, "same old loup-garou."

Adlor leaned forward threateningly. His hands at his side were clenched and he breathed stertorously. Then with a quick motion he crossed himself, letting his fingers remain in the position known as "making the horns," a safeguard against the evil eye.

"No use, Adlor," chuckled Rome, highly entertained. "That don't faze me a little bit. But what are you doing under Kitty's window?"

"What are *you* doing, loup-garou?" retorted Adlor in a fierce, snarling voice which was new to Biznet.

He did not reply, but stood, quiet, with his hands in his pockets, regarding Adlor critically. He began to feel a trifle sorry for him, and vaguely envious. Why should all men except himself find it such an easy thing to fall in love with Kitty?

“Loup-garou,” said Adlor again, “you’re one bad man, whether you’re a devil or not. W’at for you make Kitty marry you, hein? You don’ lak her, an’ she don’ lak you.”

Rome still quietly puffed his cigarette, but he was getting angry. What business had this fellow to come blundering into the truth like a Junebug into a lamp? He could see that Adlor was working himself up to the pitch of battle. Adlor made several attempts to swallow his Adam’s apple. He was trying to be cool, and to submit the thing peaceably to Reason according to the custom of these people who had attained immeasurable superiority over him by means of the mysteries of education. “W’at for you act dat way?” he said almost pleadingly. “W’at for you wan’ make her feel bad, jus’ lak your fader treat your mère?”

“None of your damn business!” said Roman, and struck out with his fist. They clinched and rolled in a flower-bed, snarling, until a thunderbolt struck them from above, and they were wrenched apart, gasping and wriggling, while Billy, towering over them, with a mighty hand twisted in each coat collar, shook them until their teeth rattled.

“What the devil!” he thundered; “must you two Canucks make night hideous like a couple of cats! What do you mean by it?”

“Damn it, Billy, you’re no peeler. Let go my collar!” Rome squealed like an indignant rat in the jaws of a terrier.

Billy gave a little extra shake to both of them. "What were you fighting about?" he demanded.

"None of your business," spluttered Rome, and by a skillful twist wrenched free, leaving his coat in Billy's possession.

"Well," assented Billy, "I suppose it is n't. But I'm going to keep this place free of cat-fights. Go to the barn, Adlor, and no more nonsense. To be fair, I don't believe you were much to blame."

Rome smiled into space at Billy's remark and went on coolly remodeling his toilet, brushing the dust from his trousers, shaking down his cuffs, and smoothing back the stringy black locks that had tumbled over his eyes. Billy tossed him back his coat, for which Rome thanked him courteously.

As Adlor slunk away through the uncertain glimmer of the now risen moon, Biznet, putting his hands trumpet-like to his lips, sent after him a dismal falsetto shriek, the same couplet which he had composed for Adlor's benefit years before:

"Oh, Adlor! Oh, mon vieux!
Adlor Santwire, tout perdu!"

They saw Adlor, a wandering ghost frightened by the cry of a fellow spirit, throw up his arms, put his hands over his ears, and run unsteadily to the stable door, which he wrenched open and locked after him with a bang.

Even Billy felt his scalp prickle at the banshee wail. "What in thunder do you mean by this performance?" — regaining his hold on Rome's already limp coat collar, Rome being helpless with hysterical laughter.

“Gentlemen don’t scrap with servants as a rule,” went on Billy magnificently, laying down the law.

“Don’t they, really?”

“And now I’ve got you,” continued Billy, “let’s have it out and do up the whole business at once.”

“You’re doing me up pretty fast,” gasped Rome, “if that’s what you mean.”

“Oh, sit down, then,” replied Billy, pushing him to a bench, “but don’t you try to get away until I’m through.”

Biznet sat down and lit a fresh cigarette. Billy turned away from him and was silent for some time, staring abstractedly at a dim light burning in the upper story of the house. Biznet followed his gaze with a smile.

“Come, don’t be bashful,” he said encouragingly; “speak your little piece.”

Billy bit his lips, staring toward the house, and then upward, with a sigh, at the round moon which now stood like the halo of a protecting saint over the dim orange oblong of the window. The light had been turned quite low. One might guess that it was left so while the occupant was at her prayers, and that she was overlong at them.

“Rome Biznet,” he said at last, “there’s something about this engagement between you and Kitty that is n’t all right.”

“They’ve told you already, have they?”

“Yes; I met Kitty in the hall and she was crying.” He did not say that during the quarter of an hour in which Roman was announcing his

engagement to Miss Tracy and Maud, he had once more been asking Kitty to marry him. He had met her, as he said, crying. He had taken her in his arms, and she had rested there limply, as if too weak to care or resist. Then they heard the chairs pushed back on the veranda. While Miss Tracy's foot was already on the lower stair Kitty had locked her little thin arms around his neck, kissed him on the mouth of her own will, whispering, "Good-by," vanished into her room, and turned the key.

"Then I met Maud," went on Billy, passing over the chronological hiatus in his story, "and she told me you had just announced your engagement. If you're such a happy pair, what was she crying about?"

"Possibly she had a toothache."

"Toothache! a lot! What have you been up to?"

"I don't see that it's any of your business, but I asked her to marry me, and she said she would."

"You can't make her happy!"

"Speaking of happiness, is n't it a good deal like Santa Claus, a thing to talk about, but not to believe in?"

"You won't make her happy. You don't love her."

"What makes you so sure? It was for saying something about as polite as that that I knocked Adlor down; but you're so big and brave that you're quite safe in being as impudent as you like."

"It is n't in you to love anything or anybody;

you *are* a loup-garou, as Adlor says, — I mean you're nothing but music, and Kitty is even more tone-deaf than I am. You will hate each other."

Rome spoke in a quiet, confidential tone, addressing space. "I am getting tired of being civil to you on account of your fists. Speaking of love, though, and granting I'm merely an unpleasant compound of loup-garou and music, I don't see why that prevents my knowing how to love."

"I beg your pardon," said Billy, suddenly changing his manner. "I have been rude. I'm sorry, as you say, that I have such good muscles — for we should both feel better for a good fair fight."

"There are pistols, you know," said Rome with eyes blazing.

"Pshaw! This is n't France, or melodrama. Here, shake hands, and let's act like men."

Rome hesitated and looked curiously at the outstretched hand.

"I think, if you don't mind, I'd a little rather not," he answered quietly. "We can talk as well without. Shaking hands would symbolize a change of heart I don't exactly feel."

Billy impatiently drew back his hand. "You might make a few allowances, I think; for I know I've been wearing my heart on my sleeve where everybody could see it and laugh. Rome, promise me you will be good to her. She's so little and helpless, and I've been thinking so long that it was I — You might be unkind without meaning

it. You talented fellows are said to be a sort of heartless lot."

He drew his hat over his eyes and turned his back. Rome looked at the tall, athletic figure with a mixture of envy, pity, contempt. A spasm of pain tightened his lips.

"I will be as good as I know how, Billy," he said at length. "You are thinking of my grandfather and father. They were a pretty unsavory lot, and I don't blame you for being anxious, but I'm not so like them as you think — at least not in all ways. I give you my word, Billy, that as far as I can, I will be a good husband to the woman you love!"

"There's no use," muttered Billy, his shoulders heaving, "in making a corkscrew of the knife after it's jabbed in." And with that he flung off toward the house.

Rome, still smoking placidly, watched him with something of that stony scorn which one of his ancestors might have felt toward a captive flinching at the stake.

He rose, stretching like a cat that has lain quiet too long, and went over to the Heathway grounds. There he laid himself down on a bench beneath an arbor vitæ in deep shadow, and propping his chin on his hand watched Elizabeth's window. He hardly knew why. He found himself imagining conversations with her, and asking for her congratulations. Yet as the two of them talked within his brain, they did not say much about Kitty. "But don't you think I'm a lucky chap?" he

insisted, eyeing Elizabeth's white curtain. "I don't know," said the imagined Bess, looking pale and sad. "Do you care whether I'm happy or not?" "Yes, I care about that. You've seen that in my face a good many times." "Yes, I have. Did I see more, I wonder?" "No, I'm different from other women, you know. I'm not the sort of woman that would ever fall in love and marry." "No, that is so; you are on a different plane from other women."

But the imagined Bess insisted on saying, in one way or another, "I don't know. Would you have cared for me if it had n't been for Kitty?"

CHAPTER VII

MIDSUMMER MADNESS

ELIZABETH was awake, Roman Biznet's 'cello humming within her brain like an insistent mosquito. No matter which side up she turned her pillow, there it sang, fine and plaintive, just within the hollow of her ear.

For an hour or so she reasoned quite sensibly about it. The nerves of her ear, she argued, were remembering sound, as one's retina keeps a vivid color. But a white night is not conducive to matter-of-fact self-diagnosis.

She went to the window at last to cool her hot cheeks, frowning uneasily at the dark outline of the Tracy house, quietly asleep among its trees. And outdoors the eldritch strings still vibrated, in the drowsy creak and chirr of insects, in the long sigh of grass and leaves, in the smell of passing roses.

"Very well, then," she said curtly to herself; "if I can't sleep I'll wake up. There's no sense in this sort of thing."

So she sternly made her toilet as if for morning, except for arranging her hair, nervously snapping off a button or two in putting on her shoes, and remarking bitterly that she was "glad of it" as they flew into far corners. "Such nonsense!" she muttered, as she bathed her eyes. "If I were

anybody else I should almost think " — But even to herself she would not put the humiliating conclusion into words.

The solemn pendulum of the hall clock accompanied her quiet footsteps through the dark to the front door ; it droned midnight after her, the Tracy clock agreeing in its slower, deeper voice. From the warm stillness a little cool breeze crept out, like the ghost of a dead childhood, and stroked her cheeks.

She stood for a while by a rose-bush, watching the insects there. They were chiefly beetles and little moths whose beauty was on too small a scale to please human fancy ; but it is worth lying in wait near a rose-bush at night, for sometimes Royalty mingles with this small fry, and he is good to see. And he came presently, as silent as a shadow, lighting upon a rose so near her that she could see the little lamps in his eyes. There are few things in the world so beautiful as a lunar moth. But presently he wheeled away on some swift errand toward the Tracy garden.

As Elizabeth passed the arbor vitæ, she peered into the blackness of its shadow, amused to fancy it the lurking place of something mischievous and of the night, even looking back at it once or twice over her shoulder as she stood among the flowering shrubs. She stood idly for some time beside the white blossoming branches of a syringa, gently chucking under the chin a flower or two ; stealing near enough to the busy night creatures to see their little red eyes. Quite in the centre, she knew, was

the nest of a chipping sparrow, and she longed to put the tip of her finger on that tiny brooding head. Was the little lady awake, she wondered? She had read that they kept their eyes open all night long, watching. Perhaps she was even then peering out in alarm at Elizabeth as at a frightful nightmare. Bess felt a sudden sympathy for all married creatures; and for the blind featherless birds within the bush the mother within her awoke. She turned away softly, as if it had been a woman nursing her baby in there, instead of a bunch of warm feathers hardly bigger than her thumb.

She thought she would go to the bench under the arbor vitæ. It would be a good place to sit and think about things for a while.

As she pushed aside the hanging branches that shut it in, she stumbled backward, with a faint cry, and Roman Biznet stood up.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I have been here for some time. I'm a night hawk, anyhow, you know. I didn't know you were taken that way, too."

"You should n't scare people so. I—I— You might turn a body's hair white!" She was twisting nervously at her long, disheveled braids to get them into more conventional shape. They sat down side by side on the bench, and he picked up the tangled end of a braid, looking at it closely with a little smile.

"It looks all right now," he said. "It is still yellow" — he brushed it across his cheek, — "and it smells sweet. What do you put on it?"

“Nothing, of course! Let go! I’m going into the house.”

“No; don’t go in. I hardly ever have anybody to talk to in my night prowlings. If there weren’t any people to be waked up by it, what a time this would be for some music! Those little chaps,” he waved his arm to indicate the small fiddlers in the grass, “they have it all to themselves, don’t they? Don’t go in. I never before saw anybody mooning around just for the fun of it the way you were doing just now.”

“I never did it before. I could n’t sleep, some-way.”

“Neither could I. I’m apt to wake up, like a cat, at night. It’s the only time I feel fit to live.”

“I think,” said Bess, “I can understand that feeling. I sometimes dream of coming out and pottering about like this — only it’s as if I were out of my body when I dream, without any law of gravitation to bother me. There’s a line of Tennyson, —

‘blown along a wandering wind,
And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight.’”

Biznet nodded approvingly. “I wish I could quote poetry. Do you ever write any yourself?”

Bess looked guilty. “What gave you that idea?” she asked, with an unnatural giggle.

“Oh, I thought you might. It’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

“I — wish I could. — We were speaking of dreams. I dream very oddly sometimes. Last

night I thought I left my body. It was a bit drizzly, you remember, a nasty sort of night; I seemed to float out of my window in a most delightful way. I was real enough, but the branches of the trees seemed to pass through me, and the rain, in falling, fell through me. And I felt fine. I was just planning to get above the storm somehow, and have fun with the moonlight, which I knew must look pretty on top of all those clouds, when I woke. You were still playing, I remember. It was about eleven."

"What, do you have that dream, too? It's something like one of mine — that is — the getting out of your body and wandering around — only — you seem to like yours. I don't like mine. Things chase me. I'm not afraid, exactly, but it's a great bore, you know, to be chased around and fight with things you can't see. Are n't you ever afraid? And do you ever have the feeling of two people being mixed up inside you?"

"No. It's a dream I'm very fond of. Sometimes I get confused and lost for a while, but the places are interesting, and it comes out all right in the end."

He looked at her uneasily, and put his hand to his throat, as though something had tightened about it. He quite understood, for she had told him, that she was different from all other women, that she was a sister to all the world as a nun is sister. But the air was heavy and sweet, and far away in the mountains there was a murmur of trouble presently for the quiet leaves.

It came to him how, when something had been wrong with his nerves abroad, and that idiot Bauer had given him morphine, he had dreamed of digging Kitty out of a smother of earth, and of how she had been Bess Heathway instead.

“Dreams are certainly queer,” he said. “You say you were alone, and like what you quoted, ‘blown along a wandering wind.’ I could fancy a wind coming up — kind of Western cyclone, you know — that could pick up you and me, bodies and all, with no more trouble than if we were a couple of dead leaves. — How warm it is! The roses smell sweet to-night. A good wind would clear the air.”

“But not a cyclone.”

“I don’t think I’d mind a cyclone. With a cyclone you don’t have to be a thin, vapory ghost to go off through the air, and — we’d take hold of hands, you know, and hang on tight.”

Bess was fingering her braids absently. Presently she asked in a small, shy voice, “Would you lose all respect for me if I confessed that I’ve tried to write verses sometimes?”

“It would depend largely on the verse.”

“I sometimes — I think of things I would like to hear in music.”

“That’s in my line. Where’s your poem?”

“Oh, it’s nothing, you know, — only it might be pretty if it were sung.”

“Let’s have it.”

“It’s about a moth and a rose. It’s rather sentimental.”

“Go ahead! How can I tell until I hear it?”

“You’ll make fun.”

“No, I won’t.”

“I’ll write it down. It sounds so silly to repeat.” He found an old letter in his pocket. It happened to be Kitty’s, but he did not notice that until the next day. Bess wrote:—

“One night in a garden a white rose woke
(Sigh for the beauty a breath will stain),
And oh! the treasure of scent that broke
(Sigh for the sweet that is sweet in vain).

“There came a moth, and his eyes were fire;
His royal wings, like the leaves, were green;
The king of the leaves! she thought, and he—
Of all white moths he believed her queen.

“They were dead when the dawn wind found them there
(Sigh for the things of a night and day),
The moon was paling, but round and fair
(Sigh for the things that must last away).”

“Umm—yes. I get your idea. Kind of rough on them, was n’t it?” A suitable melody occurring to him, he hummed softly, somewhere behind the natural harshness of his vocal chords. “It needs music to bring out the meaning of it,” he said, “the symbolism,—that you mean a man and a woman, instead of a moth and a rose.”

“I don’t know that I did mean that—exactly.”

“Well, that is what I shall make it mean.”

“I’m glad you think it’s worth putting to music. Wasn’t that thunder over there?” She felt ill at ease, as one does before a storm.

“Yes. It’s been fixing for a thunderstorm all

day. How do you suppose moths understand each other, and find each other out? They don't make the sort of mistake you've indicated here, you know."

There was a subtle vibration in his hardly audible words. She sought about for something sensible to relieve the situation, but nothing of value occurred.

"Who knows? Some sort of instinct. It's all very scientific, I believe. But people do the same thing sometimes. For instance, one would have supposed I knew that you were here and came out on purpose to talk to you — whereas" —

He jumped up to walk back and forth. "Damn it all, Bess, what are you trying to do to me?"

"What do you mean?"

"Those roses — they — they go to one's head. The wind you were so anxious for is rising."

"I am going in."

"No, you won't go in. We'll stay, both of us, and let the wind blow us where it will. It's your fault. You said you were n't like other women, and I believed you. But could n't you remember that I was a man? — or I thought I was. What right have you to call yourself different from other women? Yes! You came out to me here just as one moth goes to another. And that was what brought me to you. And I did n't know" —

"What have I done?"

"Done! Oh, nothing! The same old trick that women play" —

"I have played no trick!"

“I thought you a sort of saint. I—I wanted to be a decent fellow.”

“Rome, what have I done?”

“But it’s got me by the throat now — and what can you do when it’s got you by the throat? Oh, Lord! what can one do?”

Suddenly, with a light, easy gesture, he seemed to cast some responsibility or other burden into the air, and turned a bright, smiling face upon her. If, in the action, a subtle degeneration fell upon him, something suggesting the way a snake flattens its head before striking, she did not know it, for she could not look at him just then.

“I did not mean to offend you,” she said, and put out a hand with awkward appeal. He took it and held it hard against his cheek.

“Bess, do you believe what you’re so fond of saying, that a man and a woman may be just as good friends as two men — and without falling in love?”

“Yes.”

Her voice was weak and scared. He laughed and drew back, making a gesture that invited the rest of the world to contemplate a folly, then turned upon her with ferocity.

“Well, I don’t, and I think you’re a fool, but I’m willing to act up to your theory, if you like. You’ve said a good deal lately about our friendship. We’ll be ‘blood-brothers.’” He seized her arm roughly with savage intention.

“No — oh, no!”

“Afraid of blood?”

“ You know I’m not — only ” —

“ Well, why won’t you, then ? ’T is n’t so much to ask of this cold-blooded friendliness of yours. If you cared about me as I do about you ” —

“ Do you care — like that ? ”

“ Do I ! And yet all I’m asking is a few drops of the blood that’s been through your heart.”

Her reply was so low that her voice was obscured by the rustling leaves and he must lean very close to ask her what it was she said.

“ I was mistaken,” was what he finally heard ; and then, with a rush, “ It was because I was afraid I was going to love you that I talked so much about — our friendship, and all that. I tried to believe it because — I had to keep you in my life somehow.”

The panic of shyness overcame her again, and she shivered within his tightened arms.

“ We did n’t make the world,” he said defiantly, “ nor the laws in it for moths and people. What will happen when I kiss you ? Will God throw a thunderbolt for that ? ”

All about them was the terrified whisper of the leaves. His voice even at her ear was hardly distinguishable, seeming made up of other sounds of the storm.

Then the moon was obliterated by the clouds, and the sky crashed and blazed as if the gods were really trying to frighten them with portents. For he remembered how, years before, he had kissed her as a malicious prank, and the heavens had been angry then, as now.

And yet, to see her face, by the lightning, smiling faintly — to feel her in the intervals of blackness, warm and throbbing — one might thus dare thunder and lightning, angry deities, or men.

But the breaking of the storm seemed to remove a tension. He said quietly, “I don’t know how it is. My mind feels clearer. There’s lots of trouble coming, I suppose, but just now, someway, I can see so far! And in the end — I mean, the end that’s somewhere back of all this row overhead, you and I will look back and laugh.”

He pulled her loosened hair about them both and kissed her in its shelter, then let her go back to the safe, dry house just as the first drops splashed them.

He stayed out himself, lying on his face in the wet grass, while the rain drenched him and the thunder condemned him with its unanswerable and vociferous “Thus saith the Lord!”

CHAPTER VIII

AFTER THE STORM

THE storm that night was hard on the birds. Nests were overturned here and there, and where this had happened there was no song next morning.

At the first watery red of sunrise, Biznet, walking in the Tracy garden, saw a dead bird lying in the drift of muddy rose petals. He picked it up by a slim leg, as one takes a flower by its stem, and placed it in his palm. There seemed question and complaint in its inertness, — protest against destruction of happy things that do no evil. “I wonder if this is the little chap that Kitty was telling about?” Kitty in a gay mood had once called his attention to a faint, plaintive note floating from a high tree in the Heathway woods.

“His wife’s making him wash dishes. Can’t you see his little elbows working? And he’s discouraged. He keeps saying, ‘I — don’t — see — how — I can — *stan*’ — it — any — longer.’” And Kitty, notoriously without ear, had somehow caught the pathetic cadence exactly. “Well,” said Biznet, “so he does n’t have to ‘*stan*’ it any longer!”

The aged Susan came tiptoeing up the path to meet him. Susan was no longer shapely, and age sat so heavily upon her that she seldom had birds

for breakfast now. Deep wrinkles had settled between her yellow, anxious eyes. She received the bird thankfully. There happened to be no kittens just then, so she had it all herself. Biznet watched her grimly as she ate.

“Sic transit. Yesterday the world was a pretty good place to him, no doubt, — plenty of cherries with worms in them; to-day — I wonder what the gods had against him?”

“I wonder now if Bess is asleep?” He looked toward her window. “I can’t see any particular reasonableness in my being alive this morning. Still I suppose Kitty counts upon me. Honor is a queer thing. I wonder why it comes ahead of happiness? Honor is a pig-headed sort of thing. Just because a couple of women don’t see the point, she has got to refuse Billy and marry me. Now, if I were Billy — But come to think of it, there’s some fun for me in this business, after all. It’s ‘so interesting,’ as Maud says, to rile Billy! What an ass he is! If it weren’t for Bess, now, I could take solid comfort in going off with his girl, — particularly as I flatter myself I can make Kitty happier in the end than he ever could. I believe I am tired of music. That would be hard luck; there’s nothing else for me.” He hurried into the house, as if to forestall a threatened calamity, and took his ‘cello out of its bag.

Elizabeth was asleep then. It was late when she woke, and the cool freshness of the morning had turned to sultriness. From the Tracy house as she dressed she heard a faint sound, like the

droning of a night insect unaware of the arrival of daylight. It was Rome's 'cello. He was explaining his troubles to whatever ear might sympathize. Billy's hounds in the stable answered with tears in their voices.

All the languid morning Bess sat idle and alone in the darkened parlor, watching the Tracy house expectantly through a crack in the blind; but nothing stirred in her range of vision, — except Dr. Winthrop, whose straw hat was visible above the hedge as he pottered about in his garden. And there was a fat robin getting his dinner on the lawn; between runs and dives he kept his wings away from his hot little body and panted with the heat.

The 'cello, which had droned along in a melancholy way for an hour or two, broke off in the middle of a bar, as though there had been some interruption. She fancied him laying down his bow and turning his head as some one spoke. She wondered if he smiled, and what interruption could be worth the stopping of all that harmony. He would come over soon. She leaned forward again to peer through the blinds.

He and Kitty were walking up and down the veranda. Billy came out presently, and the three stood talking, — at least Billy and Kitty seemed to have something to say, while Roman Biznet leaned against the rail and looked over toward the Heathway house. It seemed to Elizabeth that he must somehow see her behind the blind, so intent was his look. Billy shook hands with Kitty in a soci-

ety manner, and then offered his hand to Rome, who seemed to deliberate for a moment, and then put out his own carelessly. Kitty went in. As the two men talked to each other Rome grew more animated, until at last he threw up his hand with an almost solemn gesture, like one who takes an oath. Then they shook hands again, more heartily, as though closing a compact, and Billy went in.

Rome, left to himself, put his hand to his forehead, and stood so for a moment; then he stretched himself comfortably in a steamer chair and lit a cigarette.

“And there he sits and smokes,” thought Bess wrathfully, “exactly as if we were n’t engaged; and I — watching him here, lovesick as — as — the girls I thought I was n’t like!” And she was so cross at luncheon time that she arrayed the whole family against her, from her father to the second girl, who gave warning.

It was nearly three o’clock before he came. She had gone back to her old seat, where she could watch for him best, and she saw him come out, — a cool, dapper figure in the white flannel of mid-summer. He walked slowly, with his head down. As she threw open the shutter he looked up with a smile, and, changing his course, climbed over the veranda rail and stepped in through the window.

They stood quite still for a while, their arms about each other, their smooth young cheeks together. Then she told him in a confused stammering way that she had dreamed of him all night.

“I did n’t sleep at all,” he said simply. There

were dark rings under his eyes, which were heavy and dim.

“I heard your ’cello this morning. Why could n’t you sleep?”

“For thinking of you,” he answered quietly, — so quietly as to suggest that whatever fiery thoughts he might have had were burnt to ashes now.

They sat down together in the window-seat. He kept her hand tightly in his, but leaned away from her, — his elbow on a marble-topped table, upon which was a bowl of pond-lilies.

“Roses last night ; to-day these pond-lilies. What is there about perfume, I wonder, to influence one so, — to change one’s will? Poets are always talking about roses and lilies. I begin to understand why.”

“So do I,” said Bess shyly, and nestled toward him, but drew back and grew pale at the trouble and doubt in his face.

“I’m a bad sort,” he remarked sadly.

She laughed, but shivered a little too. “As if I cared!”

His eyes brightened ; then he shook his head and looked away.

“You don’t know” —

“Nothing could make any difference.”

“Oh, yes! it will.”

“Is it — is it something that will take you away from me? — some girl? Boys do foolish things when they go abroad, I know.”

He laughed. “There’s no *grisette* or *kellnerin* following me home that I know of. But — I wish

I could have died last night, — it would be such an easy way out for all three of us.”

“What do you mean by ‘all three of us’? Who is the other?” cried Bess, drawing away from him. She was standing near the pond-lilies, and seemed to his wretched fancy drifting away from his grasp, like an elusive pond-lily into the middle of a lake. Looking past her through the window, he saw Miss Tracy and Maud coming over the grounds for a social call on Mrs. Heathway, loaded with the news of his engagement.

They heard them admitted and Mrs. Heathway receiving them in the adjoining room. They could hear every word, — polite little exclamatory greetings, the weather, the church. Biznet breathed heavily, like a man who is afraid in a dream.

“And oh, my dear,” Miss Tracy said, “I have such a delightful piece of news concerning my own little household!”

A purr of interest from Mrs. Heathway. Rome straightened his shoulders and lost his look of fear. Now that the blow was ready to fall, he could meet it as a man meets death.

“Roman Biznet and Kitty are engaged,” said Miss Tracy.

Elizabeth flushed red with anger, amazement, and shame.

“Is it so?” she asked in a low voice.

“Yes.”

“So exactly suited to each other!” went on Miss Tracy’s voice. “And perfectly devoted! — perfectly.”

“Why,” said Mrs. Heathway, “that is delightful, I’m sure. Do you know I was rather afraid it was Billy!”

“Oh, no!” said Maud placidly. “That never would have done — never. But as it is it could n’t be better.”

“Certainly not,” assented Mrs. Heathway, who was relieved for reasons of her own. “You deserve a great deal of credit, Emily, for your management of those children.”

Then he changed. With a sudden hitch of his shoulders the old goblin-like impudence reappeared. He was the same boy who had cruelly teased her at school, and he wore the same triumphant leer of those old days.

“Oh!” she said, trying to hark back to her defensive tactics of that time; “this was a pose, was it?”

“Not exactly.”

“I don’t know why you should have gone to so much trouble to hurt me. I did n’t know — there was anything that — could hurt so much. But — I shall get over it. Poor Kitty!”

She was very pale, bracing herself heavily with one hand against the table, and trembling so that the lilies shuddered in their bowl. She tried hard to smile and be proudly indifferent, remembering vaguely that it was so that women in romances masked their shame. Women in romances, she reflected, always hated a man who treated them badly, and hated the other woman. She wondered if it would be so with her. She did n’t want to hate Kitty.

“I — I shall get over it,” she repeated faintly, and looked up at him pitifully.

His only answer was to kiss her once more before he stepped through the window to depart as he had come.

CHAPTER IX

KITTY AND THE FORNARINA

THERE was a febrile uncertainty in the family atmosphere of the Tracy house at this time; Miss Tracy keeping her room with headaches, Rome and Billy pompously civil toward everybody, after the custom of those toward whom the world has not been behaving in a gentlemanly manner, while Kitty went about her affairs somewhat pale and with eyelids drooped demurely. It was difficult in these days to come upon the little Marquise squarely face to face. Billy might think he heard her light step in the hall and that she was standing by the window, some click or rustle betraying a presence there, but when he went out, just to afford her a glimpse of his stern and heart-broken expression as he passed her gloomily on some errand to nowhere, a door would be just closing gently or a quiet step in the hall above showed that she was returning to her room.

Except for Maud, who still remained as good-natured and forbearing as ever, one might have fancied that witches were about, and had found no sieve or horseshoe over the Tracy door to shut out the whisk of their evil wings. Maud would begin genial, impersonal conversations, such as should be kept crackling like a cheerful wood fire

in all well-bred households, but they died in their inception, like the flame of a match against wet wood, or if they did at last catch fire after much patient manœuvring and expenditure of breath, it would be only to smoulder and smoke with misanthropy and ill temper.

“Come, Billy, let’s sing some of your college songs.”

“Throat’s sore.” Billy took his pipe outdoors. It was a moonless night. A warm wind seemed looking nervously among the bushes for something that it could not find, but must have at once if some calamity were to be averted.

Billy gone, Roman Biznet rose with a yawn and returned the great tome of the *Inferno* to its slender table, which vibrated under its weight. He looked down upon it with a slight sneer while he lit a cigarette, as who should say that he could have given Dante and Doré points.

“And is your ’cello’s throat sore, too, Mr. Biznet?” inquired Maud, with mild asperity.

“I’m sorry,” he answered blandly, “but I broke a string yesterday and have n’t any to replace it.”

“How interesting! You were n’t playing yesterday at all.”

“Well then, perhaps I did n’t,” he admitted, undisturbed. “But really I wish you would sing, even if we don’t help you out. It might put Billy in a better temper in spite of himself.”

“Very well,” replied Maud in an expressionless tone. “I will sing things that everybody knows,

and any one may join me on coming out of the sulks."

This was a concession. It was her rule never to admit the possibility of anybody's being uncivil. To lose one's temper was ill bred.

"As freshmen first we came to Yale."

Her well-trained voice sounded querulous and lost. Biznet, puffing his cigarette smoke out of the window, watched through half-shut eyes a figure pacing aimlessly the various paths of the garden. And at the end of the veranda, half hidden by the wistaria, lurked a little shadow which only his eyes could have made out to be Kitty. He knew that she was supposed to be upstairs working on that everlasting trousseau, and was glad that she had accomplished this small peccadillo of idle obscurity.

His ears were shut to Maud's singing. The years at the Conservatory had taught him that trick of stopping the keyhole of one's brain with cotton wool.

He had nothing to do with Eli Yale, nor the man who had six cents to spend, nor Peter Gray, nor the bold fisherman who sailed out of Billingsgate, whose exploits Maud was so patiently rehearsing:—

"Oh, lift me from the grass ;
I die, I faint, I fail.
Let thy love in kisses rain
On my lips and eyelids pale.
My cheeks are white and cold, alas,
My heart beats lond and fast, —
Oh, press it to thine own again,
Where it will break at last."

“Was n't it Shelley wrote that?”

“Yes.”

“He's the chap who was drowned, was n't he?”

“Yes.”

“You sang it well.”

She looked at him strangely, a still, cat-like alertness in the turn of her head. His back was toward her as he sat at the window. She rose and took a step toward him, half put out her hand, then drew it back clenched, and swiftly left the room.

He continued peering at something outside which interested him enough so that he presently turned out the light to render himself invisible and extinguished his cigarette. The little shadow had left the veranda corner and was going down the path, halting now and then, but keeping the course, waveringly, toward that other pacing figure.

“Poor devils,” thought Rome as he watched the meeting of the two. “The song, I suppose. I don't wonder. Seems to have been too much for Adlor, too.”

The coachman stole out of a pillar's shadow and lagged toward the barn. He had not seen Billy and Kitty, nor understood much of the song, except that now that it was sung, it lay heavily upon him.

Roman saw the two face each other. He saw Billy jump toward her and put his arms around her. There was the sound of a kiss. “Oh, you cad!” he muttered. “What's the use of making it harder for her!”

But she broke away and came running back to the house, almost brushing against him, going to her room. He heard the click of the lock as she turned the key.

He drew a deep breath and laughed, but his lashes were wet. "It's a queer world. It is certainly a queer world. I don't like it particularly."

Kitty's room was dark but for a rippling patch of light from the street lamp sifting through the elms and maples. Flickering unsteadily about the walls, it had finally adjusted itself to fit the frame of the Fornarina, who thus contemplated any one who looked at her as complacently as if it were daylight.

"I must never," whispered Kitty, as she groped into the room, her hands pressed to her burning cheeks, — "I must never let him kiss me again. I'm going to be married — married! Married people have to forget."

She looked about the room wildly, in the way of a trapped animal. It is not a bad idea, sometimes, to be theatrical when alone. It may be a safeguard. The brightest spot in the obscurity drew her eyes, and she saw the Fornarina looking sideways at her.

"I was married," remarked the Fornarina. Kitty went up to the frame and shook a small fist at the handsome face.

"You were a wicked woman. I don't know much about you, because I'm stupid and can't

remember. But I know you were a wicked woman."

"I was a woman," smiled the Fornarina. "Everybody is just a little wicked, don't you think?"

"I am wicked," sighed Kitty.

"Of course," said the Fornarina kindly. "You and I are both women, you know. I was married, once."

"Perhaps," suggested Kitty, twisting her fingers together, "perhaps your husband was n't nice to you, but I am going to marry Roman Biznet, and he is good."

"I really don't remember," replied the Fornarina carelessly, "whether my husband was good to me or not. Another man was, though."

"You are wicked. Just as wicked and horrid as you can be, and I'm not going to look at you or talk to you any more. I shall take you down."

"Maud Tracy put me here. Do they ever let you change the arrangement of a room, even your own?"

"I shall cover you up."

"I can see through."

Kitty placed a palm-leaf fan in the ledge of the frame, but it only reached as far as the sidelong eyes. "How silly I am!" she laughed, and caught her lip hard between her teeth to keep from crying out.

She left the wicked lady smiling at her over the fan, and leaned out on the window sill, to cool her cheek against the rough stone. Below she could

hear Billy tramping up and down the veranda, and could smell his pipe. She even heard his groaning sigh when at last he sank heavily into a willow chair which creaked with his weight.

“If I were you,” said the Fornarina, who was watching above the fan, “I’d go down. There’s nobody in the halls.”

But Kitty knelt softly at her bedside and clasped her hands. She did not care for the Protestant prayers which she had been taught, and tried over instead the few words which she could remember from Alphonsine’s repertory. It was something about Pater Noster. Then there was Ave Maria. And the Fornarina flattened back into a photograph again. She had posed for many Madonnas in her day, too.

It was with “*mea maxima culpa*” on her lips that she fell asleep, still kneeling, and so dreamed herself a child again, lying against Alphonsine’s warm bosom, caring about nothing farther away than to finger the bright buttons on her mother’s calico wrapper.

CHAPTER X

“TWO NATURES WAR WITHIN US”

BUT Roman Biznet did not sleep that night nor the next. He began to long for the injudicious Bauer, who carried about a tiny cylinder of dreamful sleep, and was not stingy with it. And on the third morning he looked so forlorn at the breakfast table that Miss Tracy said there should be no more nonsense about it and sent Adlor for Dr. Winthrop.

Kitty and Rome had the breakfast table to themselves, he having been late, and she staying to keep him company with his coffee. “I believe you drink too much coffee,” Kitty said. “I’ve watched you, and you hardly take anything else. I think it’s horrible, the way you have it — so black and strong.”

“Bosh, nothing ails me.”

“Why, you said you could n’t sleep!”

“Oh, well, — that’s conscience, not coffee.”

Kitty smiled affectionately. “If everybody’s conscience were as good as yours, Romy, this would be a very nice sort of world.”

“Um — that’s nice. I wish more people were of your opinion.”

“People don’t know you as I do.” From which it will be seen that Kitty was becoming reconciled to the situation after a fashion.

“I ought to be a good sort — with you,” he said. “Do you ever dream?” he asked suddenly.

Kitty looked a little scared. One sometimes dreams about the wrong man. It is hard to keep one’s dreams demure and colorless, and if you can’t help remembering the Wrong Man? —

“Why, of course. Everybody dreams.”

“I suppose you are n’t superstitious about dreams? We’ve been so carefully brought up.”

“I think nearly everybody believes in them, in a way. You can’t help it, you know, when things turn out as queerly as they do sometimes.”

“I wonder if you could play Daniel for me? But Dr. Winthrop will give me a liver pill, and that will be more to the point, I dare say. Those things are all physical, merely. Do you ever get to wondering, Pussy?”

“Oh! don’t I?”

“Ever have a pain in your soul and wonder whether it was indigestion or because there was nothing there?”

“I thought it was a dream we were talking about. If you’ve got a pain in your stomach I’m sure Dr. Winthrop can fix it for you.”

“They say if you tell a dream at the breakfast table it comes true — I guess I’d better not tell mine.”

“Bess Heathway believes in dreams.”

He set down his cup abruptly.

“She says that our — our higher egos know what’s going to happen and make us dream allegories about it.”

"I should n't wonder!"

"She says, just as mamma did, that if you dream of dreadful animals and things coming after you it means trouble. You remember how Mamma Phosy dreamed of cows before — before" —

"I remember." There was a twitching at his mouth corner which seemed to pain him; he put a finger against it, as if steadying this one jangled nerve might bring the rest to order, and did not meet her eyes.

"And she says that to be drowning in muddy water means trouble, too — I don't know just what kind."

Dr. Winthrop came in then, and Kitty went up to her room to work on her trousseau.

The doctor felt Biznet's pulse and studied his heavy-lidded, dark-circled eyes. "What can a boy expect," he complained, "who does n't eat or sleep properly, swills black coffee by the quart, smokes cigarettes till he can't breathe plain fresh air any more than a fish? You might take pills until the end of time, and it would n't do you any good, if you did n't take care of yourself."

"I take as good care of myself as most fellows," grumbled Rome. "I can't help it, can I, if I can't sleep? Dr. Winthrop, what sort of a fellow am I, anyhow?"

"A pretty poor specimen."

"Is it my forehead? How much is there in the shape of a man's head?"

"Not much. Not as much as people used to think, at least."

“Ever see my father?”

The little doctor looked attentively and long at the boy's profile. “What makes you ask that, Romy?” he asked gently.

“I wondered if I am much like him, that's all.”

“You think too much about yourself.”

“Am I like him?”

“A physical resemblance means little.”

“Am I like him?”

“Yes.”

“I thought there might be some difference. I — I hoped you might see some difference.” He put his hand to his throat as if his collar choked him. “I didn't want to be like him,” he said wearily.

“You had a good mother, and a good environment.”

“His environment was just as good when he was young — McGill, you know — and all the rest.”

“You had a good mother. One hickory-nut is like another until they are cracked. I am no seer to look inside the shell. The meat of one may be worms and dust, of the other whole and sweet. You know best.”

“No, I don't know. What makes a fellow dream?”

“Coffee, conscience, drugs, underdone potato.”

“Could there be anything else?”

“It's quite likely.”

“I — I can't sleep. And when I do I dream. I don't understand things. I've been thinking a good deal.”

“I thought what mind you have was too soaked in music to be bothered with other things.”

“It’s in the music, too,” he said vaguely. “I suppose I’m just not well.”

“What is the dream you were speaking of, and what has started you to worrying about your father?”

“I don’t know; at least I’m not sure what started it. I dream the same thing over and over. There seems to be something wrong in the room, a burglar or something. It’s a long time before I can move to get up and go for him, and instead of waking I get out of my body somehow. I hear the thing breathing and think it’s going to murder somebody.”

He stopped and bit his lip, looking furtively at the doctor.

“I sometimes used to think,” he said slowly, “that my father was — capable — of murder.”

The doctor smiled.

“Oh, don’t make him out any worse than necessary,” he said. “He was more of a ne’er-do-weel than vicious, after all.”

Rome opened his lips; then shut them until there was no blood left in them. “Perhaps,” he admitted at length; “but I knew him pretty well. Anyhow, in the dream, after I get out of my body to go after this creature, I pass the mirror, and instead of seeing myself there, I see him. Then I *am* him, and I go ahead and — I am this creature I was after, too, and I do all sorts of horrible things — and enjoy it. Sometimes — it’s blood

and suffering, and I do harm to people I care about. I did n't mind the dream so much, but lately I've begun to feel the same way when I am awake."

"Two natures war within us," said Dr. Winthrop thoughtfully.

"Now, my father did n't always want to be bad. He'd get remorseful, and then go and get drunk."

"You have n't tried that yet?"

"No. It used to put me right to compose things, or just to play. But lately — that is, since — I mean — it would be hard luck if music were to fail me, don't you think? I thought maybe if I could sleep — and without dreaming" —

"Have n't you any will of your own to conquer this thing?"

"That's the discouraging part of it. I have a will — but it is n't the will I have now — I could choose if I would, but, somehow, I don't choose. And if I wake I'm sorry for a while that it was a dream — that the wicked things are undone."

His voice was almost inaudible, dry with despair. "Not long ago I — did — injure some one, though I did n't mean to. Somehow, since then, I don't know how it is, but you know that yarn about Pandora's box?"

He met the doctor's eyes for an instant with a shadow of a smile at having found a simile that pleased him. Bess talked in similes and quotations.

"Well," he went on, "it's like that. I've

always felt there was something wrong inside me that I had to keep a tight grip of or” —

“Could that injury be repaired?” asked the doctor.

“No ; it’s spilt milk. I did n’t really know I was doing harm. But are people made like that? Is it fair that one wrong thing — not so very wrong, either — should throw a fellow so completely off the track ?”

“I don’t know,” said the doctor sadly, “that there’s much question of fairness about those things. I used to have all sorts of opinions. Now I have only one, and that is, that a man has to put up a pretty good fight, and not feel too bad over failure. It’s all summed up in that, though I might spin it out to any length.”

“Yes,” said Biznet slowly, “put up a good fight ; but what can you do when you don’t want to fight ? If I always felt about it the way I do now — but I don’t. If it were just a case for pills — but it is n’t. If anything, I feel better physically when I’m — when I’m a bad Injun !”

He smiled and threw out his chest a little, as though his confession had shifted a load from his back. The doctor, on the other hand, grew round-shouldered, as if assuming the burden himself and helpless under it. His liver began to wake up. Rome still smiled tentatively. He felt that he must be a rather unusual and interesting specimen. It was pleasant, too, that Dr. Winthrop found him worth sorrowing over.

“If pills could make a fellow well in his soul,” he suggested.

The doctor wrote out a prescription and tossed it over with an impatient gesture. "That's all I can do," he said. "Sleep, eat, live by schedule, stick to your music, then your better nature will get a chance. And you've got to stop thinking about yourself," — he hesitated and looked at the boy vaguely, as though from a great distance, as though it were a difficult thing to remember the idiosyncrasies of youth, like something learned by rote, long ago, and of little meaning. Then he continued, "and wanting things too much. It's been said that it is unwise to desire a thing too much. And one man says that the chief danger in desiring a thing too much is that you're apt to get it."

"Is that so?" said Rome, with an eagerness almost ferocious. "Who says that?"

The doctor eyed him narrowly. "And when you do get it, you find it's only a handful of dry sand."

Biznet's face was deeply flushed, and the fire fading from his eyes left in them a dim and far-off look. His hand on the table was clenched, his nostrils dilated with his heavy breathing.

"What I desire," he said at length, "would not turn to dry sand in my fingers."

"Are you so sure?" asked the doctor sadly. "Myself, I find that Fate is a good enough manager in the end, and patience is the only thing worth desiring."

"I have been patient," said Biznet.

"Patient!" said the doctor wearily, pressing

his hand to his side. "Come to me again in forty years and tell me then what you mean by patience. You know nothing about it now."

"Don't I?"

"Young people," mused the doctor, "have such heavy and mysterious sorrows! What's the use of taking things so seriously? But I suppose they can't help it. I could n't. Stop biting your lip like that — it does n't do a bit of good, and when you draw the blood it just proves you the Injun you are."

"I'd stop wanting if I could. How can one get rid of one's self, as you said a while ago? How did *you* do it? Since you know so much" —

"Only little by little. By wanting to, and not getting reckless at failure, by taking punishment like a man when it comes. I knew a young chap who was drinking himself to death, and breaking people's hearts, — he used to hold a lighted match against his arm after he'd been on a spree. His arm looked like small-pox most of the time. He fancied he could mark his moral improvement by the comparative freshness of the scars. I don't say it was a good plan, but it at least showed a proper desire."

Biznet remembered that when the doctor's sleeves had been rolled up he had noticed a curious white pitting in the yellow skin.

"Did it do any good?" he asked.

"I think it may, a little. At least it did no harm. You see, it was a form of spanking. He remembered that spankings had once been a good remedy for jam-stealing."

The old man mused, his eyes shaded with his hand, as if the better to see things very far away, and to get from them some precedent to apply to the case in hand.

“It need not have been a defeat,” he said, as if to himself. “Yet I’m not sorry. One learns comparatively little from success. Success is just a flimsy bit of comfort, candy given to a good child. There’s a poem somewhere that explains how failure and success have got each other’s names — not a bad idea.”

He came back from his brief review of his own mistakes and studied the boy’s face carefully. The Indian was there, sinister and cruel; the musician, wide through the temples, level-browed; the mouth was fine and sensitive at the corners, though the lips were full — that was probably the French blood, the best heritage he had. Yet perhaps he must go back to his savage ancestors for help. Perhaps his weakness and his strength were but two sides of the same coin, and it was from old Powasket, or rather, from some old chief further remote and unpolluted by white men, that victory would finally come.

“Romy,” said the old doctor, “don’t fight too hard, and don’t worry. After all, the problem is mostly a physical one. A strong body is really strength added to the side of one’s better nature.” He pointed with a yellow finger at a cigarette stub and smiled whimsically. “Let’s see your cigarette case. Ah, I thought so! Some girl wanted to please you — silver — monogram in turquoise

and opals. I think I want that. Take this instead.”

He put the pretty trifle in his own pocket and handed over a well-worn leather case full of cigars.

“These may be immoral — Mr. Wells preached against them last Sunday — but they ’re not coffin nails.”

“But I — it helps me to write, you know.”

“Can’t help it. And about coffee. I’ve heard how you go at it — always with coffee things in your room — great cup that holds a pint, black and strong. Now, tobacco and coffee are splendid things, but they are n’t food. And you must exercise. A saddle horse would be just the thing for you, better than a bicycle, for there is something about the feel of that great barrel of health and strength beneath you that is a tonic, or ought to be. Why, I used to have a horse — but he has been clover these twenty years.”

“I can’t afford a saddle horse,” said Biznet, flushing.

“Then take long walks. And see here: all these moral struggles — it’s mostly stratagem and understanding one’s self; and then one’s growth in strength is surprisingly out of proportion to the effort made.”

“Do you mean that?”

“Yes; for I know. I sometimes think that any battle at all is in some sort a victory. It’s just to keep your nose upstream, like a fish; to keep headed against the wind like a bird caught in a storm. There is a knack about it.”

Biznet smiled rather unbelievably. "You would solve the world's problem simply" —

"No, nobody does that. It's only my observation of the way the world solves its own problem — just by growing."

In some indescribable way the gloom lifted a little. Dr. Winthrop, watching as if to observe the effect of medicine, thought he could discern a firmer setting of the mouth, a locking together throughout the whole body of muscles and will, a smoothing out of the forehead lines.

"Well," said Biznet, "I'll try to behave — but I've got such a beastly headache just now. And can you make me sleep?"

They kept him smokeless and coffeeless for two days, and then much to Miss Tracy's alarm, he insisted on rising, dressing for dinner, and spending the night in the hammock. He lay back on the pillow Kitty had gently forced upon him, but the afghan they had spread over him he rolled into a ball and flung as far as he could. He would have liked to worry and tear it, for he had watched Maud Tracy crocheting the last of it when he first returned. He would rather take cold and die; in fact he wished he might. Then Bess would come to the funeral and see him stretched out pale and interesting, his face white for once, and his hair very black against it. His 'cello would be too big to put in the coffin with him — why in thunder had n't he thought of that sooner and chosen a violin instead? They might

build an addition to the coffin, he thought lazily, but there was a line where romance ended and farce began, and so —

He felt quite comfortable and at peace with the world, thinking of Elizabeth with a satisfied smirk, and that he must be a pretty attractive sort of fellow. He wondered why he should have been so down in the mouth when talking to Dr. Winthrop. He could not at all understand his own mental attitude of the last few days. To-night, at least, he was himself; alert, well, mischievous. The air was full of life, tingling with music. Lying back in the hammock he beat time with his forefinger for an imaginary orchestra — beckoning up the crickets here, the flopping of a toad there, the distant solo of a screech owl. It was good to be alive, and awake in the night.

Then he curled down in a comfortable position, drowsily planning great things for violins, 'cellos, horns.

The trees against the sky seemed spelling out a wonderful score, phantom instruments stood about in the shrubbery, and he harangued their shadowy players grandly. They looked up at him, and their faces were as the face of his father.

He started awake, with a little cry of fear. The trees were trees once more, and the wind was only a wind, but there was moisture on his cheeks, which might have been dew or tears. The impish joy of living in which he had fallen asleep was gone, leaving him sick and afraid.

He turned on his face with a heavy sigh and

slept again. The trees spelt the score, the phantom orchestra stood about in the shrubbery. He stood up before them, baton in hand. "The Lenore Symphony — the march — remember, gentlemen, that this is a march of ghosts, and play it so :—

' Sieh da, sieh da, am Hochgericht
Tanzt um des Rades Spindel
Halb sichtbarlich beim Mondenlicht
Ein luftiges Gesindel.' "

But he knew that he was asleep and alone outdoors. Some one came out of the shadows and bent over him. He scurried back from his orchestra to wake himself up, but it could not be done. Nearer and nearer the figure bent, and still he could not stir. It departed finally, and then he slept dreamlessly until morning.

CHAPTER XI

A PRECEDENT WHICH DOES NOT APPLY

MIDSUMMER was green and drowsy throughout the land, having lost the romance of those flowers that grow of their own desire, unless one cares for such weedy things as daisies and yarrow. In the woods great brakes replaced trilliums and adder-tongues, spreading their umbrellas over the wasted brook that it might not perish. The thrill of preparation was over for the year, only a dull waiting in the heat for the fruit time, a beginning of the decay of such things as bore no fruit, having been spendthrift in the matter of leaves.

It was a time for sitting about in cool clothing, meditating and gossiping if you were old or middle aged, getting into idle mischief if you were young. Some of the Cosmos people spend these lifeless days at their lake cottages, and there one can row about on the never stagnant water and listen to whatever remarks the never dying pines may make. The lake and the pines are judicious counselors if one is bewildered. They echo and reëcho any wise conclusion one comes to, and take no notice of a foolish one except to sigh and laugh until its foolishness becomes apparent. Pines and lake were visible from Elizabeth's window as she lay ill for a while. But she was too young and

impatient to lie there long with the lake laughing and the pines sighing at the very notion of being disappointed or discontented about any matter. In three weeks she found it worth while to investigate a robin's family in one of the pine-trees, having become interested in their rearing from her window, and then, the lake being near with its ripple of quiet merriment, rowing about in a boat seemed more sensible than lying in bed. One could see the sunsets better, and if one lay quietly on the oars, queer birds were likely to appear in the submerged treetops and say pleasant things with unexpected quirks and chuckles. She became quite interested in trying to decide whether it was the more desirable to be an ornithologist, an entomologist, or a botanist.

The Tracys stayed in Cosmos, the women sewing on Kitty's wardrobe. Most of the work was done behind the vines of the veranda, while Rome looked on with a serious air and played his 'cello, or smoked quietly, studying space with an abstracted frown that suggested musical puzzles being worked out in his curious brain.

Kitty, Miss Tracy, and a seamstress had been working eagerly on a pink affair, while Maud read aloud from a magazine. She read well, in a placid voice that suggested elocution lessons from some good teacher. After a flurry of departure within doors for the purpose of "trying on," Biznet took up the book and opened it at random to a rather interesting picture of the uniforms and hoopskirts

of war times. A black-robed girl seemed spurning a gallant looking fellow in shoulder straps. There was a suggestion of moonlight, mystery, and unhappiness that promised well.

“Is that an interesting story?” Kitty asked. She had returned without his hearing her. Sewing was dismissed for the day.

“It interested me.” He wore the blank, surprised expression of one who sees some important matter in an unexpected light.

“What’s it about?”

“About a girl that would n’t marry a fellow because his father killed hers in the Civil War. What do you think of the girl’s mental attitude, Pussy?”

“Would depend on how much she thought of the man,” said Kitty, languidly judicial, “and on how much she thought of her father, and oh, on lots of other things.”

“I should have supposed — I don’t see what the old gentlemen had to do with it. They did n’t ‘go for to do it.’”

“I guess somebody wanted to write a story,” said Kitty carelessly.

“Now to emphasize that situation a little,” said Biznet, studying Kitty’s plaintive little profile with interest, “if it had been murder — if the young chap’s father had killed the girl’s father in cold blood, would the girl’s ideas be inevitable?”

“How can I tell? It would depend upon the girl.”

“Suppose you were the girl?”

“I don't like to talk about murders, Romy. I should n't think you would, either.” Her lip trembled.

Was there no way to make her reply to an hypothetical question? Did Alphonsine's ghost stand between them? And if it did?

“What in the world is the matter with you?” asked Kitty.

“This story interested me very much. I thought you might be willing to talk about it with me.”

“Why, I'm willing. I only thought it was the sort of subject that you and I avoided.”

“But not because it does n't interest us!”

She looked at him with grave attention now, and nodded her head with a wise air, as one who holds the key of some perplexity.

“I know what you're going to say, I think. Is it about mamma? Is it who killed her?”

He stared.

“You need n't mind, for I guessed long ago. Of course I was n't sure, and I did n't like to speak to you about it, though I've often wondered if you did n't think as I did.”

“You cared enough about me — about my future?”

“I don't know that I put it that way, but that may have been why. I did n't think it out until after you went abroad. And then it all seemed so long ago, and you were all I had. He had killed your mother, too. It made no difference about my feeling for you. While you were abroad I read something in a Montreal paper. I thought

first I would send it to you. Then I didn't see the use."

"I'd been hoping he was dead," said Rome.

"I think he is, Romy. There was a fiddler named Tony who played at a habitant wedding and — and insulted the bride, you know, — and they chopped his head open."

Biznet laughed without mirth. "I don't wonder you thought that filled the bill. Probably it was my noble father. We'll hope it was. But suppose it was n't, Kitty? Suppose when we get prosperous he should come around and try blackmail — what should we do? Hang him?"

"It will be time to decide that when he comes," said Kitty sagely. "But I think he's dead."

"No," said Biznet, "not quite dead as long as I live."

"I wonder what you mean?"

"Dr. Winthrop says I'm like him, that's all."

"Nonsense! Dr. Winthrop knows a good deal, but not everything. Do you think I'd marry you if you were like your father?"

"I don't know. Tony used to be able to make women believe in him. There was more than one woman who would have cut off her ears for Tony, when he had on pretty clothes and pretended to be a gentleman. I can remember that much, kid as I was."

"Oh, well," said Kitty contemptuously, "I'm not attracted to you in that sort of way at all. You can't scare me with your badness after being good so long. I think I'll go into the garden and get some carnations for the dinner table."

Biznet leaned back in the steamer chair, his hands clasped behind his head. The droning afternoon grew remote, and he shut his eyes with a greater feeling of peace than he had known for some time. It is pleasant to be believed in. One feels more of a man, somehow, and one's faults do not seem so overwhelming.

A little breeze rustled over the grass like a trailing skirt, or was it a trailing skirt that stopped near him?

"Where's Kitty?"

He looked up quickly. Bess was there. Her face was turned aside, but did not seem shy or ashamed — rather as if avoiding some noisome and repulsive thing; there were dignity and contempt, immeasurable aloofness. She was pale and thin, and her dress had become careless again.

"Kitty is in the garden," he said.

"I came to congratulate her," said Bess, with a slight smile that set his cheeks on fire. "It's nearly two months since I heard of the engagement; I don't know what she'll think. I have been away, and I was ill for a while."

"Ill?"

"After our attempt at melodrama."

"I only heard you had gone away. I am sorry."

"Are you? I had supposed it would please you. I hope Kitty will have better luck."

"It does please me," he said, looking at her in a way that she could not face, but she shrugged her shoulders with some bravado as she turned away.

"I wish I believed in you enough to think it worth while to ask you to be good to her. But I don't."

When she was gone he walked up and down restlessly, with a foolish desire to follow. Not that there was anything further to be said nor any comfort, now, in her presence. He turned whither the invisible ropes were pulling, first picking up the abandoned magazine to give some color of nonchalance, and sat down at one end of the path, where he could watch at the other end Elizabeth's white umbrella and the sweep of her white gown on the grass as she sat by Kitty.

Presently they rose and without turning toward him strolled arm in arm toward the downward slope leading to the Heathway woods.

He returned to the story of which he and Kitty had been talking, and read it again with mental comments. The black-robed girl spurning her Northern lover seemed a stagy minx, and human nature more complex than literature would have us believe.

He let the book fall to the path, and leaned back with his hands behind his head, his cap visor pulled down. The trailing of a skirt upon near-by grass startled him with the notion that Bess was coming toward him again. But it was Kitty this time, returning alone from the Heathway woods. "How thin Bess has grown!" she said thoughtfully, sitting down beside him. "And how much nicer than she used to be! I used to think she was noisy and conceited, though she was always gener-

ous. Now—I wonder what has changed her so?”

“She has been ill, I understand.”

“Yes, while they were at the Lake. She says her hair is all coming out. I promised to make her some sage tea.”

“Sage tea? What for?”

“It keeps the hair from coming out. You rub it in. She has such pretty hair! It would be a great pity. I don’t see anything to laugh at!”

CHAPTER XII

A QUESTION OF ETIQUETTE

IN the cool of a late August morning Miss Tracy and Maud were together on the veranda, Maud with the family stockings, Miss Tracy mending a three-cornered tear in the sleeve of Roman Biznet's coat. She daintily abstracted the remains of something crumbled to dust.

"Those nasty cigarettes! And he knows I don't like him to smoke."

"But he says it helps him in his music," said Maud, lifting an eyebrow with 'humorous incredulity. Natures constructed like a thermopile, vibrating to the heat of moon and stars, their emotions fed by a cigarette, puzzle those of strong character, but are amusing and interesting to meddle with, like any other delicate machinery.

"And of course," said Maud, "we don't want to interfere in any way with *that*."

"I thought when he came back last June he was really going to be a gentleman at last," said Miss Tracy plaintively. "I thought his life abroad had done that for him. But he's showing his ancestry. Half the time he even forgets to say good-morning!"

"Strange," said Maud, "how blood and breeding

will tell, in spite of genius and accidental advantages, — as in the case of the Conto girl.”

Miss Tracy looked troubled. “ I am sometimes afraid I have been unjust. I never dreamed of her scheming about Billy until you mentioned it. My life has n’t been particularly easy since I took those children, Maud.”

“ I know.”

“ Duty is an unsatisfactory thing. It is like ” — she burst out passionately with a simile she had read somewhere — “ it is like dry sand to a hungry, thirsty soul ! ”

“ And you have never questioned it’s being your duty ? ”

“ I don’t know. I thought then the Lord meant it so. But mother used to say I always went to extremes.”

“ Extremes of kindness, perhaps,” said Maud gently. She laid down her work and sat back in her chair, holding up her hand in a ray of sunlight, studying the facets of an old-fashioned amethyst ring, as was her habit when pondering deeply. It may have been the reflection of the vine-leaves that made her eyes green at that moment ; and there was a hint of satisfaction in her expression. Miss Tracy returned to the examination of Rome’s coat pockets.

“ It’s odd how men and boys will carry around old messes in their pockets. Here’s a whole coil of broken cat-gut. Why does n’t he throw it away ? And here’s a woman’s handkerchief.”

“ How interesting ! ”

“It must be Bessie’s, for here’s an H in the corner. I’ll have it done up and sent home.”

“And what are those papers?”

“Scraps of manuscript. What a tangle of notes! Oh, here are some verses scrawled on the back of an old letter! ‘One night in a garden a white rose woke,’ — oh, yes! the words of that song he’s been working at lately.”

“The envelope is addressed in Kitty’s handwriting, is n’t it?”

“Yes; I wish the rest of her education were equal to her penmanship. I have her address letters for me sometimes. This is probably one I sent him last winter. I wonder what I said?”

She drew out the letter; then put it back hastily with a troubled expression. “Oh, it is n’t one of mine! It’s from Kitty herself. She generally shows me her letters.”

“I should think that was a good rule. You’ll read it now, I suppose?”

“Why — no.” Miss Tracy had got as far as “This is just from me to you.” “It would be dishonorable.”

“Nonsense,— under the circumstances!” Maud leaned forward, looking at the letter with narrowed eyes. “It’s your right to know what’s going on,” she said. “It might throw some light on various things.”

“But — they’re engaged. I’ve no right.”

“They were n’t engaged then. I want to know — for Billy’s sake!”

It was not clear in just what manner Billy was

to be benefited ; but one must do many things in the name of wisdom when one has the care of young people. One must always know what is going on in one's house.

“ But whatever it is, now that they are to be married ” —

“ Well, they're still dependent on you, aren't they ? How do you know what scheme may be on foot ? You can't be too careful. You ought to know everything, *everything*, that goes on. You say it is a rule that she must show you her correspondence. She must have had a reason for violating it.”

“ But ” —

“ Your conscience is too tender, dearie,” said Maud, smiling. “ Come — let me read it. I'm willing to shoulder the responsibility.”

It is hard always to know exactly what is right. Doubtless Maud's judgment was best, — Maud was so wise and broad-minded. One must be broad-minded to do the expedient thing.

When Maud had read the letter through she handed it to Miss Tracy, with lifted eyebrows. “ About what I suspected.”

Miss Tracy read slowly, growing first pale and then red, while her eyes moistened.

“ I've been unjust,” she said, feeling for her handkerchief. “ She was unhappy, and I did n't realize.”

“ Unjust! — you ! ” exclaimed her niece with righteous indignation. “ I never heard of such ingratitude as that letter shows. And the very

idea of her suggesting to keep house for him in New York!"

"Why, I don't know; that seems natural enough. They've been like brother and sister."

"And the idea of her speaking so about Dr. Winthrop! 'He seems to blame himself for letting Miss Tracy have me.' How is that for fabrication, pure and simple?"

"I don't know; I remember he seemed to doubt the wisdom of it at first." Miss Tracy put her hand over her eyes and leaned back, trembling.

When we have reared an edifice of good intention, self-sacrifice, long endeavor, and have grown accustomed to considering it a rather fine affair, it is disheartening to find that there has been all along a stratum of shifting sand under the foundation, to suspect that the Lord may not have given the matter as much thought and approval as we had supposed. Or was it unskillful building merely? At any rate, it is disconcerting to consider the cracks, fissures, and general tawdriness of the result, that it may presently crumble to ruin, and that things are worse instead of better for its having been at all.

"She goes on to say," said Miss Tracy, "that I have been very kind."

"And so you have. 'And Billy tries to help me when he comes home; but they don't like to have him. . . . Billy is part of my puzzle. . . . What makes men act so, anyway?' I should say it was a fortunate thing you found this letter!"

“But, Maud” (Miss Tracy was wiping away tears) — “but I don’t seem to see anything in the letter except the natural unhappiness of the child at her failure in her studies.”

“Oh, if the letter were all! But can’t you see how it was written when she began to doubt the success of her plans about Billy? She thought she was justified in not paying much attention to her studies because she was counting on him for her future. Then she saw I understood her game, and started another — which has succeeded.”

Miss Tracy looked at her niece in some bewilderment. “You are speaking almost as if you did not approve of the marriage. I thought we had agreed it was such a good thing.”

Maud hesitated, bewildered also. That was not the idea she had intended to convey.

“It is her neglect of her opportunities at the Normal that — angers me. It is only as an alternative that the marriage is desirable, — two penniless children, and — dependent.”

“I — I seem to have failed,” said Miss Tracy wearily. “I meant her to be — a — gentlewoman — and — truthful — I thought when I was old — it would be something to be happy about. I suppose I lack discernment.”

“It’s not you who have failed,” said Maud. “You know what the saying is about making a silk purse out of a sow’s ear.”

“I wish I had had you long ago! Yet I thought I was doing so well. And what an influence for good you have over Billy! I have done my best;

but you are nearer to him than I — you are so like your mother.”

“Billy, and of course you, are all I have,” said Maud, pressing her aunt’s hand and sighing.

A heavy tramp sounded in the hall, and Billy appeared at the open door in knickerbockers and sweater. The two hounds, leashed together, were tangled madly about his legs, whining with tremulous eagerness, their yellow eyes moist with joy.

“I’m off for the Lake,” he announced. “There are some fellows I know camping down there. Will you say good-by for me to the rest of the folks and to the Heathways when you see them?”

“Why, Billy!” said Maud. “Is n’t this a sudden notion? How long are you going to stay?”

“Until the second weck in October,” he answered, bending over Bose and pretending to loosen his collar. The two women exchanged glances of dismay.

“You must be back for the first,” said Miss Tracy in a low voice.

“Da— I mean — I don’t think I can, possibly.”

“You must, Billy,” said Maud authoritatively. “You must n’t sulk like a silly schoolboy. Do you want to be laughed at by the whole town? Bess Heathway is to be bridesmaid, and you know Rome wants you to be best man.”

Billy looked at his sister defiantly. His face had lost its bright color and was thin and worn.

“Women are queer,” he said at last in a puzzled way. “What do you think I’m made of, anyhow?”

“I think you are very cowardly,” said Maud, avoiding his look, “if you can’t face a little disappointment and chagrin like a man. If it’s only out of kindness to the Conto girl” —

“I don’t think,” said Billy slowly and sternly, looking straight at his sister’s flushed face, “that I’ve observed so much kindness toward the ‘Conto girl,’ as you call her, from you as to warrant you in fretting about my kindness toward her.”

“Billy, how can you be so unjust!”

“For shame, Billy! To your sister!” said Miss Tracy.

“Aunt Emily,” said Billy wearily, “I don’t pretend to understand women or their ways. You and Maud tell me I’ve been a fool, and that Kitty — has what is best for her. I’m in the way, and I’m going to get out and stay out until it’s all over. You’d better not object, or I might interfere with your plans again.”

“My plans!” echoed Miss Tracy in a frightened tone.

“Everybody’s plans!” rejoined Billy. “I had one plan, and it seems to have made a fool of me. I don’t care to be a marplot and a spectre at the feast and all that! Good-by.”

His voice in the last words trembled like a disappointed child’s. He stepped back into the hall to take his gun from the rack. They heard him go out the back way, and presently saw him, with his brier in his mouth and Bose and Tray waddling unevenly at his heels, striding down the driveway toward the hotel where the stage was to

stop. His soldierly swing and the rifle on his shoulder gave him the look of a man off to the wars. Before he was out of sight he met the phaeton in which Biznet and Kitty were returning from an early morning drive.

“Well, at least he has the decency to stop and speak to them,” said his watchful sister.

Then he strode out of sight, and the cousins drove up the lane. Presently Rome strolled through the hall from the back of the house, having left Kitty to wander about the garden alone.

“Did you have a pleasant drive?” asked Maud, looking up with a smile from her embroidery, which she had resumed with sudden industry.

“Charming. So Billy’s off, is he? I don’t see what fun such a hunter as he is can have in the close season!”

“Oh, well, he can shoot at marks, and eat canned stuff, I suppose; but the game protector is a great friend of his, so I dare say he will get along very well.”

“I’ve just had a letter from Liebermann, my manager, you know,” said Rome, turning to Miss Tracy, “asking me to come down to Long Branch through September as his guest. I shall have to start next week, I suppose. Then I will come back for Kitty at the time you have already set for the wedding,—that is, if my programme suits everybody else.”

“Oh, yes,” said Miss Tracy indifferently. “My head aches. Don’t move. The day is pleasant for people who can enjoy it. You and Maud stay

out here. But I think I will lie down for a while."

Biznet sat down in the chair she had left, lapsing into artistic abstraction, frowning into space, his eyes focussed on some point beyond Maud's head, and through her, while his fingers drummed a fancied melody into the arm of his chair. He was bewildered presently to hear Maud say with unwonted sharpness, "What are you looking at me like that for? Don't you know it is very rude?"

"Is it?" he answered blandly, rising to the situation at once with enthusiasm. He had intended to quarrel with Maud at some time or other, and was rather pleased that she should begin it.

"I should have supposed you might have acquired at least the veneer of a gentleman after all this time."

"'T is queer, is n't it?"

Maud rose angrily, gathering up her work to depart. But as she stood up Kitty's letter fell from among her silks at Biznet's feet. He stooped courteously to pick it up for her.

"Oh, indeed!" he drawled, returning it to his own pocket. Maud looked angry and startled.

"As to my having a letter addressed to you, it is one Miss Tracy took from the coat she was mending for you. Here are some 'cello strings, too."

"Well, what then? I didn't accuse you of having read it, did I? (I don't care for the strings, thank you.)"

“I should hope not!” she blazed, righteously.

“You did, though,” he went on calmly.

Confusion of one’s real character with one’s working model is easy. Maud’s ideal was very high, an infallible pattern, and she did not distinguish that she had in any way departed from it, nor recognize the *reductio ad absurdum* in her indignation at Biznet’s suspicion that she had done a thing well reasoned out as not dishonorable.

Perhaps it is wisdom to obey the letter of the law as well as the spirit, and not to meddle with any old established rules of good breeding; for etiquette is merely skin deep, but honor a very jugular vein in importance, and the jugular vein lies quite near the surface, and must be treated with respect.

Maud lifted her head with the magnificent air of one too innocent and maligned to attempt defense.

“How dare you speak to me so!”

“And what do you think of it, now that you’ve read it?” he pursued confidentially. “You see, there’s nothing like a little trick or habit. I always put a letter in the envelope with the edges up — not a good way — a careless way, but it saves trouble. You and Miss Tracy put the fold upward, because it’s easier to take out, I believe — better form. This letter, by the way, is one that might be misunderstood, I suppose, by any one who — preferred to misunderstand it.”

“I should think that its meaning was only too plain!”

“I did n’t think you’d walk into the trap in quite such a hurry!” he grinned.

“Well, then — if I *did* read it? Kitty is supposed to show all her correspondence to my aunt. Miss Tracy read it and asked my opinion, as she had a perfect right to do.”

“No, she had n’t. And she would n’t have read it if you had n’t advised her to!”

She would have crowded past him into the house, but he caught her wrist with a vicious wrench and pushed her back into her chair. There was a moment’s canine uplifting of his upper lip as he did so, and the defiance ebbed from her face, leaving fright there.

“I’m going to call a spade a spade,” said Biznet. “I’m going to tell you what I think of you, and it is n’t going to be a love story, either. You’re green with jealousy of Kitty. Why? Because your aunt adopted her when she was a baby? She had no more to say about it than a child has about the family it’s born into. Because Billy fell in love with her? If this letter proves anything it proves she had nothing to do with that. Because she’s going to marry me? But that’s what you wanted from the first, is n’t it? You wanted her to marry me, did n’t you?” His black eyes narrowed disagreeably.

Her lips were white and stiff. She held both hands against her breast, clasping the wrist on which the marks of his fingers were still red, and stood up, unsteadily but with dignity. “You are cruel, and you don’t understand. I’m sorry I

read the letter. I have not meant to hurt anybody nor to be dishonest. I meant—for the—best.”

“Then,” said Biznet, dropping the insolence from his voice, but with some sternness, “be good to her while I’m gone.”

CHAPTER XIII

KITTY CONTO'S HERESY — AND A STRANGE VIOLINIST

WITH the departure of Billy and Rome the world got along more amicably with itself in Cosmos, and Maud's invincible good temper made headway. The women settled down to Kitty's wardrobe with real enjoyment. Bess Heathway came over to lend her skill, such as it was. While she worked for Kitty, setting awkward stitches and patiently taking them out again, Kitty would be busy about her, pecking here and there with needle and thread. Perhaps she was glad of an excuse to find something else to do than the endless trousseau for which she cared so little.

"My dear, I thought this spring you were really going to spruce up and attend to your clothes like a real lady-girl. What makes you so lazy?"

"What's the use? It all rips out again. Who cares how I look, anyway?"

"How can it rip if you never sew it up? I never saw such a girl!"

"I never look decent, no matter how hard I try. You're the bandboxy one. However do you manage?"

"Oh, I don't know," sighed Kitty, who had fallen idle again. "I've been getting careless

lately, myself. It's easy, once you begin. I have n't washed my hair for six weeks."

"What makes you keep that fan over that picture?"

"What picture? The Fornarina? A convenient place for the fan, I suppose."

"What wicked eyes she has! I would n't like to live in the same room with her watching all I did."

Kitty and the Fornarina exchanged glances of intelligence. Kitty looked out of the window, drumming on the pane with idle fingers.

"I suppose you're very fond of Rome," said Bess presently, setting some stitches that were awkward beyond belief. She stabbed her finger with the needle when she pronounced his name, but her voice was placid enough.

"Fond of — why, of course!" assented Kitty absently. "Who would n't be?"

"Yet, somehow, you don't seem so very happy. Of course, I don't know anything about such matters, but I supposed girls about to be married were too jolly for anything."

"Jolly!" echoed Kitty in a light-hearted tone, — "why, I'm as jolly as — as" — She laughed, and, from laughing, cried as if her heart would break. Bess went to her, and the little black head burrowed into her bosom like a kitten taken from its nest and scared at the world's bigness.

"Kitty Conto — you're *not* happy. Don't you really care for him?"

"Care for him? Of course I care for him —

but, oh Bess, I wish I did n't have to be married!"

"Wishes she did n't have to be married!" echoed Bess, and stared sombrely over her head at the Fornarina. "Loves the man, but does n't want to marry him. Well!"

"It's like dying — or going to be a nun," sobbed Kitty. "I'll have to think about him always and forever, and nothing else!"

"Loves him, but does n't want to think about him all the time!" said Bess. "I think — of course I don't know anything about such things — but I think, if I loved a man" — she stopped — "if I loved a man," she continued, unsteadily, "I imagine I could not think of anything else, no matter if I tried. I think I should n't know how not to think of him." She pressed her cheek against the shining black head.

"Kitty, dear, tell Bess. What makes you cry?"

"Because I'm a very silly girl," said Kitty, sitting up, and adjusting hairpins in a matter-of-fact way. A suspicion and a hope which had flashed across Elizabeth died down. She went back to her sewing.

Kitty watched her furtively and pondered many things. She was uncertain just how far she had made a mess of circumstances and whether there was anything she could say to reassure Elizabeth. Bess did n't look very well. Probably she had troubles of her own without worrying over those of Kitty Conto. Bess always did worry over people so! So it seemed expedient to Kitty to

deliver a little lecture on the subject of true love. If Bess knew no better it would probably seem reasonable enough.

"You see, it's this way." She was taking down her disheveled hair. Difficult talk is easier if the fingers are busy. "I'm very fond of Rome. Of course I am, or I would n't have accepted him."

"Of course," murmured Elizabeth's grave lips.

"I never could care for anybody else — never — but — but men sometimes get tired of their wives."

Elizabeth smiled. "If that's what's troubling you" —

"N-no, not exactly that. But I'm such a dull little thing, not knowing anything about music."

"He hates musical women."

"Yes — I know. But, well, you said you did n't know anything about love, so how can I ever make you understand?"

"I'll try hard if you'll be patient with me."

"Well, it's just this, then. No matter how much you love a man, you'd rather not marry him!"

The hair enveloped her completely now. She peered through it stealthily at Elizabeth to see the result of her startling heresy. Bess frowned in a puzzled way at the work which had fallen in her lap.

"That is n't so, Kitty," she said at last, quietly. "That can only mean one thing. You don't love him."

"Well," said Kitty then, playing her ace of trumps, "he loves me enough to make up! So I shall learn, and it's all right, anyhow. Did you

know he was coming back to-morrow? Must you go? I had so much to say."

The fall rains were lowering in the sky, though the yellow maples kept up a pretense of sunshine. On the day that Biznet was expected, Maud Tracy and her aunt had a wood fire built in the damp parlor, and its cheerful yellow sparkle almost brought a glow of health to the magenta upholstery of the room.

"I believe I'll have the room done over next spring," said Miss Tracy, looking forward to future lightness of heart and heaviness of purse. "It ought to be more homelike for you and Billy."

"I think I'd like red wall-paper," said Maud; "that deep rose that they're using so much now."

A desire for rose-colored walls and drapery is apt to seize a woman of thirty or a trifle past. The effect is better than rouge, and does not injure the conscience.

"This weather makes me restless," said Maud, glancing at a gilt clock under a glass case that always pointed to the eleventh hour. Then she consulted the watch at her belt. "Adlor meets the train, of course?"

"Yes."

She sat down at the piano, playing carelessly; but with whatever melody she started it was sure to change presently to something of Biznet's composition. There was a thing of gloomy march movement which he had called "The Battle in the West": —

"Far other is this battle in the West
Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth."

"I am sick of music," she said, when she had played this through, and went abruptly to the window, where she stood with forehead pressed to the glass. And while she frowned at the yellow maples a trio of wandering musicians strolled through the gate, lugging harp, violin, and viola. As they settled beneath the window and began to tune, Miss Tracy, sitting before the fire, gave a little cry.

"I thought it was Rome's 'cello again!"

Maud laughed rather bitterly. "I don't wonder. The house is haunted with that 'cello, I sometimes think. It seems to be in every creaking blind or squeak of a mouse. Good gracious!"

"What's the matter?"

"One of these Italians looks enough like Roman Biznet to be his own father, or himself!"

Miss Tracy came to the window and adjusted her pince-nez.

"It is strange, is n't it? But I always thought he had a rather Italian look. All Canadians with the French-Indian mixture have it."

The man of whom they were speaking was the violinist and leader. He looked over his shoulder at the women in the window and smiled widely.

"I am sick of music," said Maud for the second time, as the shabby three played "Non e ver." But as it went much better than one expects of wayside music, the violin, particularly, being extraordinarily good, she sang with them, not so softly but that the leader threw her a quick glance of

approval, at which she stopped, paling, for it seemed impossible that two men could have that look in common, although the face of this one was shriveled and evidently long past middle age. Yet there was an alert and invincible youngness, such as belongs to old and feeble grasshoppers in autumn, who keep the vitality of Tithonus.

“I should almost think it was he, masquerading,” she said to Miss Tracy.

Then they played that little march of Biznet’s which had grown popular, and which its maker despised. But as they finished, having received a quarter with many smiles and bows and gone off under the yellow maples and brown leaves, Maud watched the violinist with an eager stare.

“I wonder!” she said.

Bess came in just then and asked for Kitty. She had brought with her a hemstitched ruffle which had cost long hours and bleeding fingers. It was grimy and uneven in result, and many strange bits of philosophy had gone to its making. She had read somewhere that if one is in danger of hating somebody, it is well to make some kindly sacrifice of love instead—mechanically, as one takes medicine. She understood that in theory she was bound to hate Kitty, and so began the endless ruffle while she was still ill in bed, and whether the ruffle had anything to do with it or not, there was not at any time any jealous poison in her sore heart. Dr. Winthrop, to whose knowledge this little act came, as did pretty nearly everything

concerning the two families, sooner or later, would have given something to possess that ruffle, grime, tiny blood spots and all, to keep it for her as a document of value against a possible Day of Judgment. Kitty met her with an air of mystery and good news, and pulled her eagerly into the room.

"I want to talk about something." She shook a small forefinger accusingly. "You're in love with somebody — who is it?"

"You idiot child! Just because you're in love yourself, you think everybody else must be."

"But you are!"

"I'm not! And I don't like you to talk that way."

"You can't cheat *me*! Is it — Billy?"

Bess laughed so heartily that Kitty grew slightly indignant. She did not see anything impossible or absurd about loving Billy Tracy.

"I have other things to think about besides being in love," said Bess, with some scorn. "Some people seem to think that's the only thing in the world worth thinking about. I don't see why. It is n't so awfully important. Men don't think about it as much as women do — that's because they're always doing something — machinery, or law, or medicine, or fighting. It's easy enough to keep one's mind full of something sensible, to live on a higher plane. I'd rather just have friends anyhow. I've been studying botany this summer. You've no idea how interesting botany is" —

"If it is n't Billy, it must be Rome," said Kitty.

“Why — why — the very idea! You’re going to marry him yourself next week!”

“Tell me — is it Rome?”

“Of course not — the very idea!”

Kitty went over to Bess and knelt in front of her, turning her face to the light. “It is! Just as sure as the world! You can’t look me in the eye any more than a cat — and you’re going to cry! Don’t go — please. Don’t be mad — I wanted to tell you” —

But Bess was rushing down the stairs. On the steps she ran plump into Biznet himself, who bowed gravely as she drew her shawl across her tear-stained face. Adlor, as he turned the carriage toward the barn, glanced at her curiously in a way she afterward remembered.

CHAPTER XIV

KITTY SOLVES HER PROBLEM

“WELL, Pussy, by this time next week we shall be on our wedding journey.”

She looked sidelong at him over her shoulder, with a suppressed alertness that he did not understand.

“You don’t seem to detest the idea, exactly. Did n’t happen to fall in love with me while I was away?”

“You and I did n’t have to fall in love, being brother and sister so.”

“How has Maud treated you?”

“Oh, she has been just lovely. You must n’t blame her and Miss Tracy, Rome. You know how stupid I am and how much they have done for me. And anyhow, it was you Miss Tracy adopted. I was only a bargain end, thrown in for good measure.”

“So Maud has been lovely to you, has she? Um! that’s nice.”

“Rome, I want to ask you something. And you must n’t mind, and must answer true. Were you ever in love with anybody?”

“Don’t you mean anybody else? I’m pretty well in love with you, Pussy.”

“I don’t like you to pretend. Was there any-

body? There was! There was! You are fidgeting, you are blinking, as you always do when you tell lies."

"Be still! You don't know what you're talking about. How could there be anybody else? You don't suppose I class you with *kellnerinnen*, do you — the girls that students know? If you are thinking of a barmaid rival" —

"It was n't that I meant. All that is nobody's business but your own."

"Don't get ideas, for heaven's sake," he said.

They were walking in the threadbare October garden, their steps deadened by the sodden leaves that fell too thickly for Adlor's rake. There were borders of scentless asters, and where the fragrant rose hedge had been the thorns were bare, the scarlet hips dotting them like drops of blood. The blackness of frost was upon all tender plants, the hardy ones looking weary as though leaves were become a burden and a responsibility.

Kitty picked up a fallen bird's-nest, and tried in an absent-minded way to restore order to its raveled straws and horsehair. Something in its inner softness elicited an amused chuckle. She drew forth a soiled and tangled wisp of light hair.

"Of all things! I cut off this lock of Bess Heathway's hair last spring. It was always coming into her eyes and I could n't stand it. And here it is! Did you ever?"

She looked at him in solemn mockery and held out the trash between a dainty thumb and finger. "Don't you want it?"

“Why should I want it?”

“Then why do you look at it like a cat at a piece of meat? And what makes your eyes get pink in the middle? I thought you were clever! Oh, I’m not stupid about *everything*. I knew she cared for you, but I wanted to make sure about you — and now I’ve done it!”

He took a step toward her menacingly, his right hand gripped upon his cane until the knuckles were white. Perhaps Antoine and Phœbe had looked at each other like this before these two were born. But Kitty was the daughter of Alphonse, in whom was no fear. Presently she smiled, and without mockery.

“Don’t be angry,” she said softly, “I did n’t mean to hurt.”

The band of anger that had clamped his forehead fell away. He flung his cane into the hedge with a gesture of horror, and sat down wearily on a bench, with averted face.

“You will never trust me now,” he said unsteadily. “But it’s only that my nerves are out of order. I — would never have struck you.”

“Would n’t you? But it does n’t matter. You see, I understand so well. I think it’s better to have such things understood between us. Don’t you?”

“I don’t know that I’ve admitted there was anything to understand, have I?”

She laughed. “Oh, no! You are very discreet. But you see I am unusually clever.”

“I don’t admit that, either.”

“ Well, it does n't matter what you admit. Bess is even less clever than you are. She began to cry as soon as I talked about you.”

He sat up and met her eyes defiantly. “ Well, for the sake of argument, then, suppose I do care for Bess and she for me, what then? You and I can't go back, can we? Who owns us? What can we do? You've got your trousseau. I've taken our rooms in New York. Bess has her mind made up to be bridesmaid. Now what's the use of going and spoiling it all? People get over that sort of thing. All we have to do is to settle down and be sensible, like folks.”

Kitty studied her engagement ring in the contemplative manner that she had learned from Maud Tracy.

“ Well, what would you do about it, supposing I admitted it (which I don't)? ” he asked again fretfully.

“ I don't know that there's anything to do, ” she replied slowly, holding her diamond so near her eyes that they turned in.

“ Everything will go all right once we get to New York.”

“ Yes, — once we get to New York.”

“ All we've got to do is to be sensible.”

“ Yes.”

“ What have you got in your head? You look as sly as a cat that's been at the cream.”

“ In my head? Oh, I was planning how I'd fix our rooms in New York! I like red; don't you? ”

“ I'll like anything you do.”

“Bess Heathway likes blue.”

He took hold of her arm and shook it brutally. “Get that idea out of your head; if you don’t, there *will* be trouble. How would you like it if I kept talking to you about Billy.”

“Oh, I should n’t mind!” She rolled up her sleeve and looked with a curious smile at the marks of his fingers on her arm. “A year from now,” she said, “there will be marks like that on my throat, I suppose. We are starting well! But I have an errand — to get a seamstress from the other side of the river. Adlor has the carriage ready, I see. Good-by.”

He did not raise his head as she walked away. But she had not reached the turn of the path before she came running back. She threw her arms about him and kissed him many times, sobbing (though her eyes were dry and bright), and saying that he had been very good to her, that she had n’t meant to hurt him in any way, and that she should never forget — never. Then she was gone.

As to what followed, no one ever knew how long before it had been planned, nor what the circumstances of the strange and sudden courtship between Adlor and Kitty had been. Miss Tracy, and Maud — and Billy, too, when the news reached him — swore they had secretly loved each other for years, that it was a case of like returning to like, and that the Tracy family might wash their hands of the matter with good consciences and talk about Ingratitude.

But Bess Heathway cried all that night, believing that Kitty had sacrificed herself for her; and Roman Biznet paced to and fro, heavy-eyed and white-faced because he had once more made a mess of it, though sometimes he would look stealthily toward the Heathway house.

And this was what happened: The carriage did not come back when in all reason Kitty should have finished her errand with the seamstress, and it did not come back at dinner time. Miss Tracy looked anxious, and Maud went about with lifted eyebrows. Rome walked to the seamstress's house. They had not been there. Of course he knew then, though he tried to reason it out some other way. But he remembered how Kitty had kissed him as if for good-by, and how she had said she should "never forget." He walked home slowly, and as he passed the Heathway house looked toward it with a strange expression.

Mrs. Heathway heard of it through the servants, and came over with bulging eyes, and she and the Tracy women sat about and talked in low tones, listening to everything that passed in the road. Miss Tracy lay upon a lounge, and the other two fanned her and held salts to her nose.

Dr. Winthrop came over and listened a while to their excited accounts, saying nothing, but looking exceedingly grim. Then he went out, and found Roman Biznet strolling about the grounds, and walked with him arm in arm; and Roman told him everything, laying particular stress on the fact that he (Biznet) was a fool and a brute. And

the doctor quite understood how it had all come about, and blamed nobody very much.

But while they walked together they heard carriage wheels far down the road, and presently the horses turned into the driveway. There was foam upon them, as could be seen in the obscurity of the night.

“*Hola, mon vieux!*” said Biznet, running to their heads. But it was not Adlor who jumped down, and, thrusting two letters into Biznet’s hands, ran swiftly away into the dark.

“To Miss Tracy and to me,” said Rome, reading by the glow of his cigar. “Come in with me, won’t you? It’s two men’s work to defend her.”

This was Kitty’s letter to Miss Tracy:—

DEAR MISS TRACY,—I am sorry that I have disappointed you in every way. You have tried to be very kind to me. If marrying Rome could have really paid you back at all, I should not have done what I have. But I thought it over very carefully, and it seemed to me that I should only be a drag on him and keep him from paying his debt to you, to say nothing of my own. If you had never taken me, I should probably have married Adlor, or somebody like him. Perhaps he and I will be just as happy as though I had not been educated more than he has. I could never have earned enough to pay you anyway, and now at least you will not have to spend any more for me, and Rome will have an easier time paying you for himself.

Very sincerely yours,

KITTY CONTO SANTWIRE.

“Oh, the cold-bloodedness of it!” was Miss Tracy’s comment. “She thinks of nothing but the money I have spent. The time, the care, and my — my affection, count as nothing with her!” She faltered, for Dr. Winthrop was looking at her with great sternness, and then she began to cry so gustily that he was obliged to think of himself as a physician and do what he could to avert hysteria.

“What has she written to you?” asked Maud, noticing that Biznet still held an unopened envelope.

“I don’t know yet. I shall probably not tell you when I do know. I don’t need to open the envelope to be sure of one thing, and that is that my cousin is as innocent and good as a baby in arms. Adlor is a good fellow, and I wish them happiness with all my heart.”

“How extremely noble! But perhaps you knew all about it beforehand and helped them off!”

He looked her over slowly from head to foot, then turned on his heel and went to his room. This was his letter: —

DEAR ROMY, — We *were* brother and sister, and it would n’t have been right. I should have dragged you down, and you would have kept on thinking of Elizabeth. Now you will marry her. She loves you enough to wait a long time, and you love her that way too. As it is now, you can think of me kindly as your little sister. But I knew this afternoon, when you started to strike me and

when you hurt my arm, that you would want to kill me. That was partly why I teased you — to find out what you would be like if I bothered you. I don't believe you will ever want to treat Bess so. People don't if they really care very much.

You must n't worry about Adlor and me. He has a job at Tupper Lake. We shall do very well. He has always been very fond of me. In time I shall slip back to about what I should have been if Miss Tracy had n't educated me.

I don't believe I cared so very much about Billy. I can't be sure, because I feel so queer and numb about everything, and I can't tell what matters and what does n't. I thought some of dying, but when I found I could make some one happier by staying alive, I thought I would — for a while at least, and one does n't know what there is after death, you know. I don't believe the priests and ministers know any more than you or I do. But flowers are pretty and worth living for — better than not knowing or seeing anything at all.

I hope you and Bess will be happy. And please give her this same ring that I am sending back to you — I shall like to think of that.

Be a good boy and try to think kindly of your little sister

KITTY.

CHAPTER XV

DOCTOR WINTHROP CONSIDERS AN ALLEGORY

THE same night that Kitty went away thieves came to town. Some of the Heathway silver was stolen, and the Tracy chicken roost suffered. So there was much to talk about next day — enough for everybody, and fruitful subjects of conversation are so rare that a chicken or two and a few silver spoons seem a small price to pay. The chickens and the spoons were small weapons, but Dr. Winthrop used them with great skill to divert the talk from Kitty. He would say cheerily that it was a foolish thing, perhaps, but that they were all good children and probably knew their own minds best; then he would hint darkly at the robberies, suggest a lair of tramps in the woods that ought to be unearthed, tell of sights and sounds as of many marauders and hint terrible things they might do if they had a chance. And he painted the unknown terror black with such painstaking skill, that before night people were far more anxious about their own safety than about Kitty Conto Santwire's morals, and the locksmith drove a brisk trade.

Roman Biznet, being now the only man in the Tracy house, offered to sit up that night and keep

an eye on the outbuildings, and on the prospect in general.

It was a good night for mischief of almost any sort. The moon, in its last quarter, did not rise until toward morning, and there was a restless wind that engulfed all such noises as stealthy footsteps, nibbling at locks, suddenly stifled cries of people or chickens. The sky was clear and starry. A man may see well enough in the starlight to follow out a purpose, but following the man himself is a problem more involved.

Roman Biznet, in his capacity of chicken warden, sat in a corner of the upper veranda, commanding the outbuildings, the slope toward the railroad tracks, and French Hollow. But his mind ran little to chickens and pilfering Frenchmen.

He was planning Elizabeth's future and his own. There was to be a flat in New York, chiefly given up to a grand piano, a bass viol, and apparatus for making coffee. He planned it something on the pattern of his bachelor life abroad. They would take their meals out, Bess not being much of a cook or given to domesticity in any form. He wondered if it would be of any use to try to teach her the piano, or if it would lead to rows. Perhaps it would be better to encourage her to turn her attention to poetry. The Lunar Moth was not so bad — perhaps she could do librettos for him if he should venture upon an opera. He had no doubt about his "hit." Liebermann had no doubt, so why should he have any? It did not greatly trouble him that there was a little matter of recon-

ciliation with Bess to be gone through, and that Judge Heathway had a will of his own, which he exerted in his family with great success.

He was in a good humor with himself and the world. Perhaps Kitty had really loved Adlor! And if so, things were coming out right all around. Some day he would do something for Kitty and Adlor, when he had paid Miss Tracy.

It seemed the world might sometimes give a man what he wanted after all. He smiled over his shoulder towards the Heathway house, with a pleasant sense of security.

But the wind kept up a snarling and chittering as of pursuer and pursued all about the house-corners, up and down the empty verandas, through tree-tops, chasing leaves, bits of paper, intangible shadows of nothing. Shrugged into his overcoat, he might himself have been one of the pursued shadows, slunk into this coign of vantage long enough to draw breath and become substance.

And out of the little wind-blown stars, the Adirondacks folded like clouds, the trees, a musical theme untwisted in a widening spiral of imagined sound, until he must place his phantom orchestra in order about him, banked mistily beyond the veranda rail, bass viols, violins, horns, of most perfect skill — to elaborate his theme for him, which should next winter be written on paper and played by a real orchestra — when he and Bess were married.

His idea had been of music that would express placid approval of a world which now and then

gave a man what he wanted, but presently his genii began a very different exposition. His drowsy ears heard alien voices, — undertones and overtones, that became dominant and were not according to such mathematical laws of sound as he knew. There was disagreement with his hypothesis of a kindly world wherein a man might receive what he desired, — there was no provision, they said, for such an outcome; it was not feasible that there should be, for such conduct would be at variance with some large law of more importance than happiness. While fretting over this pessimistic notion, he fell asleep, and into the misery of that familiar dream.

While he struggled to get out of his inert body he knew that the customary visitor was approaching down the length of the veranda behind him, yet his half-open eyes could not change their focus from the veranda pillar and a patch of sky and mountain. And then the creature bent over him and sighed, so that its breath stirred his hair.

He writhed free and seemed to fall limply at his own feet, like a moth just out of its cocoon, then stood up peering blindly at a shadow that did not, as usual, try to avoid him by sneaking to his rear. There were eyes, and bristling ears.

“Why, what nonsense!” said Biznet. “It’s the loup-garou.”

It became clearer when he had named it and grinned familiarly. Biznet grew sober and thought of that remark of Elizabeth’s about dreams that Kitty had quoted — how a dream may be an alle-

gory, and have within its ridiculousness a meaning that something we speak of as our "higher ego" wishes to teach us.

How if this were the result of that polarization which had so long been making confusion within him? If his two selves were at last unfolded from their fourth dimension, and now, standing face to face, might settle that debate forever!

Yet it was with an inward grin at taking a dream so seriously that he leaped at the shadowy throat, and plunged lightly into mid-air with his enemy. And it would seem that there must be still another self somewhere above them who watched the struggle, saw that it was like an eddy of dust, and cried shrilly, "Two natures war within us," not giving hope of victory to the one or the other, but stating a law of the world as inevitable as the laws of winds and tides.

And then—what was it that loped gleefully across the garden and the railroad track beyond it, down through French Hollow and the marshy hummocks of the Heathway pasture, frisked among the tree-trunks of the woods, then back through the air, as a sudden notion took it, to sprawl under Bess Heathway's window and look up with lolling jaws.

And Bess was coming down. Bess always would come if Roman Biznet sat under her window and looked up. It would make no difference how bad and strange he might be, nor if he were in truth the loup-garou.

She was coming, while overhead something

whispered, "Warn her! — warn her quickly! — that two natures are within us, and that one of them is a beast."

Thereupon he sat up, broad awake, though not quite free from the were-wolf, which still snarled within him because the dream had not lasted long enough for him to throttle Bess Heathway.

A red ribbon of sunrise had stolen out from behind Mount Powasket's shoulder.

Something creaked down among the apple-trees: he turned toward the sound, like a cat toward the nibble of a mouse. That should be the thief, coming from the Tracy buff cochins. He had intended, if this crisis came about, to capture him cautiously, but firmly, and take him in civilized manner to the county jail. But his neurotic mind, newly roused from the dream of a fight, had not had time to replace things upon their familiar footing. His heart beat with savage irregularity, like a fist striking to left and right; there was turmoil in his throat and ear-drums.

Leaping lightly over the veranda rail, he scrambled down the wistaria vine, sensible of an apish lightness of body. But something pressed upon the top of his head: he thought it was his cap, and tossed it away to let the wind run its cold fingers through his hair. He approached the chicken-house, skillfully dodging about bushes and fences; the door was open. Somewhere in the direction of the dim sunrise, through a white mist curling and lifting from the lowlands, there came

a despairing buff cochin squawk. It was stilled suddenly; but there was a scattering of yellow feathers, and presently a trail of blood which led the way when the squawks were silenced.

The rapid action of running and the brisk air dragging the blood from his brain and sending it healthily to the rest of his body, gave his gasping sanity another hold on life. He had no clear idea of what he should do with the thief when he got him, but there was a joyous invincibility about his finger-tips. He laughed suddenly at the notion that a man's throat was located something like that of a 'cello, and that the cords of his neck, if pressed —

“Why,” he said aloud, “that's something the way I felt after Bauer's hypodermic!”

The Heathway woods lay like a charcoal smear in the mist. He stumbled through muck beds; but whatever noise he made would pass for the blundering of the cattle. A cow's head, the rest of her wrapped in mist, stared at him for a moment, like a mask hung in the air.

“To dream of cows means trouble,” he said. “Whey there! — so, boss, so!” She vanished with a windy snort, and he kept on until a tangle of underbrush caught at his sleeves, and a web of small roots confused his feet. His eyes could not pierce the fog as they could darkness; it got under his lashes like wool. He could hear the brook chuckling in front; the other side of it there was a crackling sound, which might be cattle. But there was a tiny drop of blood on a stone, so he

knew that the chicken slayer was somewhere near. It was a tramp evidently, and the crackling sound was the gathering of firewood.

He went more softly then, and listened between steps. The fog was thinner in the woods; the little brook, reflecting it, was as white as milk. It amused him to be watchful and cat-like with his quarry, instead of collaring him at once, as would have been quite possible, for the fellow seemed to feel safe and careless as he crashed about in the underbrush.

Then an opal-like glow shone through the mist. He had built his fire then, and presently would have chicken for breakfast. Biznet wondered whether he were provided with pepper and salt. He was hungry himself. He had n't been hungry for so long! He had once been familiar with this kind of breakfast. While the chicken is cooking one should play one's violin; that times them well, and when they are done —

There was a faint musical twang, like the string of a violin. Roman Biznet threw his arms about a friendly tree-trunk, hugging it tightly, unreasoningly, as one in some sudden peril takes sanctuary at a wayside shrine. The rough bark bruised his cheek; he stared through the mist, and put up a groping hand to fight off the white obscurity. Since last hearing a fiddle in these woods, he had dreamed of knowing people of gentle lives, of a girl with yellow hair and wise gray eyes, but all these things were vanishing as if they had never been; he had dreamed that he was a

man, in a world of men, but he was waking, and knew these things were impossible.

And Antoine played: Antoine, then, was no dream. As he played his son came slowly to him through the lifting mist. Antoine gave one little start when Roman appeared, as if some one had jogged his elbow; then grinned widely, proceeding with his playing.

“Well, Romy,” he said at last, laying down the violin, “so you’ve come to breakfast!”

“I thought you were dead!”

“Well, I ain’t. What are you fainting for?”

“I’m not fainting. Take that bottle away. Damn you, I thought you were dead!”

“Why, you dear child! How you do talk!” drawled Tony. “Here, drink, damn you!—and be quick, or I’ll hold your nose!”

And Rome, around whom the mist had changed from white to black, felt his throat scorched with his father’s cheap whiskey. With that stinging fire inside him the world seemed a better place and Antoine not such a bad fellow. He looked up at his father and laughed, thinking how he had feared to dream of him.

“That’s the way to talk,” said Antoine kindly; “no use in wishing people dead, particularly fathers. Sacré-damn! how you look like me! I mean as I was at the Monastery and at McGill and all that, before the world began to go against me.”

“You mean before you began to go against the world?”

“No, I don’t. I’m all right: world’s all wrong.

Chickens are done, — Tracy chickens, same as you get at home. Vive les poulets ! ”

He salted and peppered the chickens (formerly there had been no salt and pepper, Rome remembered) ; then they ate, — carnivorously, so that one would not have liked to ask a share of the meal for fear of hurt. Rome ate half his chicken ; then reached for the bottle of his own accord.

“ That ’s right, ” mumbled the hospitable Tony, with full mouth ; “ help yourself. ”

But at the cordial invitation Rome stopped and frowned, as though his father had said “ Hands off ! ” Could it be something tangible and real that plucked at his coat sleeve ? Did a hand reach up out of the mouldy leaves, — a small, firm hand, like Kitty’s ?

To drive away such fancies he tilted up the bottle and drank half. Then he remembered that it was somewhere back in Canada they had buried Phœbe, so she could not have crept through the earth to be here in the Cosmos woods.

It was a good world and a reasonable one, if you considered it rightly. Or was it he and Antoine who were good and reasonable ? And did the world have hard work in living up to their standard ?

“ Play something ! By George, you shall play in my orchestra this winter ; we ’ll be pals. Tune up, Tony. ”

Tony tuned up, and Tony played, and the woods were filled with bacchantes, satyrs, evil faces, until

Roman Biznet laughed in uproarious content to see all his wicked dreams coming true at last.

“Don’t stop, Von Kettner,” he shouted, when Tony paused to refresh himself from the bottle.

“Quoi?” said Tony, puzzled.

“Von Kettner! — that was his name, and should be yours and mine. Von! We’re gentlemen, you and I.”

“The devil! Your head must be weak.”

“No, it ain’t. ’S-strong’s iron! Gimme the fiddle, *mon père*, till I play you ‘Ein rothes Mäuschen,’ — then you’ll know!”

They broke the fiddle between them — the fiddle from Cremona come to this, by what devious paths! Tony’s hair sat up straight, like a dog’s hackles; his narrow forehead lay in crosswise folds. He leaped at his son’s throat with a roar ending in a falsetto whimper, fighting with his jaws, gorilla-like. Something apart from the young man, yet of him, still and watchful, saw Roman Biznet gather himself up to the counterpart of his father.

They bit, tore, scratched, fighting grotesquely, as anthropoids may have fought before men were, — burrowing among the dead leaves. “Two natures war within us,” said a voice somewhere very far off. They strained at each other silently, their veins standing out on their foreheads, knotted and blue. Tony’s teeth were fastened in his son’s wrist. Suddenly his jaws relaxed, he gasped, and tumbled in a quiet heap.

As Rome drew back, waiting for his enemy to

show some new sign of life and hostility, he heard the voice saying again in a calm tone of virtuous triumph, "Two natures war within us."

This then was that Other Fellow who had been giving him so much trouble lately.

The Other Fellow did not stir. Rome stood up, and looked down at him, mistily. His wrist hurt, and he examined curiously the semicircle of blue marks from which blood was oozing painfully.

The broken violin caught his attention. He picked up the pieces and tried to fit them together, looking now and then in sulky defiance at the prostrate figure. Tony seemed to have flattened, somehow, and sunk deeper into the disordered leaves, since he fell.

The mist cleared as he worked over the broken edges of wood. There came a serene smile of early sunlight upon the bare tops of trees. A chipmunk, dashing past on some urgent errand, ran over the quiet figure in the leaves.

Roman Biznet looked up at the sunlight, at the distinct tree-trunks, at a crow flapping heavily toward a dead pine, at the fragments of wood in his hands, at the motionless man in the leaves. Whatever cloud it was that had rested upon him that night, dissolved.

Dr. Winthrop was asleep, so his curtains said to all who passed, and the boys going by to school stopped whistling, according to many years' custom. The fathers of some of them had been drilled to it before them. Even to-day, when the house

stands empty, there are men who will tell you that they fall silent from habit as they pass, and that the fearless whistle of the youngest generation seems to them sacrilege and insult, although they know that the little doctor has now slept almost long enough to make up for those many white nights, and by glancing at a hill just beyond the house one can distinguish the stone that symbolizes this rest, as the drawn curtains of his window used to do.

On this morning, the curtains being drawn, there was no one in all the village who would have waked him.

Yet some one pounded on his door, stammering his name with lips too stiff with fear to be intelligible; and the little doctor, waking, knew that here was one worse off than he.

When he opened his door Biznet fell across the threshold. His face was ghastly, his eyes dim and staring; his mouth opened and shut spasmodically as he breathed.

Dragging him to his own bed, the doctor worked over him patiently, doing this and that in an easy, precise way without question, as he had once worked on battle fields, until the stertorous breathing stopped. The boy's eyes shone wide with intelligence and terror. He put up his arms around the doctor's neck and drew him down, holding him tight, babbling softly an incoherent story about something dead in the woods, about his mother, about Alphonsine, about Kitty, about Bess Heathway — so that the doctor, not understanding who it was that lay dead in the woods, fell into a panic about Bess Heathway.

“Tell me,” he said, in a sterner voice than he had used since the days of battle, — “tell me at once exactly what has happened.”

And the sharp voice did what kindness could not have done. Biznet sat up. “I’ve killed my father. Will you go with me to the woods?”

“I don’t know much about it,” Biznet explained as they walked together through the fresh blue morning.

“By your breath you’ve been drinking.”

“That is n’t what made me do it. Something happened in my head. Two natures war within us.” He spoke in a bewildered way, mechanically, as if repeating a lesson. “I think I thought he was some one else. Two natures war within us.”

“What did you do to him?”

“I don’t know. How long ago was it that he and I buried my mother in the woods? And he killed Phosy. Nobody knew that but Kitty, but it does n’t matter now. She’s married. I did n’t want Bess to know, either. But it does n’t matter. You may tell her if you like. Two natures” —

They left the crisp glare of sunlight for the broken shadows of the woods, and stepped across the chuckling brook. The fire still smouldered, having reached out a red tongue to lick at a pile of leaves near. Pieces of the violin lay scattered about, as Rome had dropped them when he fled. A little further was what the doctor at first thought to be a prone tree-trunk.

Antoine lay sprawled and huddled, dingy and threadbare as a long dead leaf. Dr. Winthrop

put his hand on a thin shoulder and turned him over. The eyes, half open, were still bright as if with intelligence, but the lines of the face were relaxed to such a degree that one could not have said with any great assurance, "This man was a devil." He seemed placid, somnolent, even kindly.

And when the doctor had looked over the body, straightening it out into some dignity, he almost laughed with relief, for there was no mark on him.

"No tragedy here, my boy. It's as natural a thing as sleep, — a matter with which we need not concern ourselves, except to be glad."

Biznet went for other men, while the doctor sat by Antoine. He laid the Cremona on the fire, where it sent out a faint resinous odor like sandalwood, and he sat so still that a crow, swooping down, had almost lighted on the dead face before it descried the living watcher and flapped away with a startled "Quoi!"

If one might so fight with one's self, thought the doctor, as the lad in his delirium had fancied he was doing, life would be simpler. To bring the thing, once, thus, to tangible debate and then to leave the worse element vanquished and dead!

He bent over the dead man and studied carefully the ill-planned head and features. Everything seemed so wretchedly wrong! Who blames the rattlesnake for its poisonous bite? Its venom was carefully constructed to that end in the crucible that fashioned the first snake.

Perhaps for Antoine there was nothing but evil

possible. Yet in his son there was a germ of desire. By a germ of desire men's skulls have been enlarged from generation to generation, until at last a man is rather worthier than an ape. Can one man do what the race has done? Dr. Winthrop wanted very much to think it possible. If the boy could keep well—if Bessie would make him a wise and loving wife—here the doctor shuddered at the idea of that experiment's failing, but his patient philosophy comforted him with the idea that life is not very long and that its chief use seems to be as an experiment anyway.

Love might do much, and then there was the music, so much greater in him than in his ancestors. One might hope at least.

Antoine's heart had broken with his fiddle. When Roman Biznet was his own man again he grieved for them both, yet exulted, too, in a way, as if it had been in some sort a victory. And Cosmos never knew the name and the history of the dead chicken-thief, deciding after a brief inquiry that the battle redounded to Roman Biznet's credit, even Squire Heathway admitting that he had not supposed the boy possessed of so much grit.

It was Dr. Winthrop who persuaded Rome to keep silence in the matter, arguing that there was much to be lost and nothing to be gained by publishing Antoine's identity. It was to conceal it that he had burned those precious fragments of the Cremona.

But the little doctor mused much over that

notion of Roman Biznet's that his lower nature was somehow embodied in his father. It seemed to make a satisfactory allegory, when one put it that way, as if most moral struggles were in the nature of parricide.

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